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The Man of the Miracle

THE STRANGE STORY OF A MODERN MEDICAL MYSTERY

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OLD John Barker Macraw—generally known in his office as "J. B."—was standing at the window, frowning. Beneath, he could see a narrow strip of Wall Street, but it was not at that vehement street he was frowning. It had never been unkind to him.

The old-fashioned room in which he stood was his private office. It was rich and silent and orderly. Packed away in the big safe, in the cabinets and mahogany boxes, were the bones—the pelts and hides—of forty years' good hunting in the street below.

At last he turned away from the window and glanced around the familiar room, with its stirring memories of adventure in the jungles of finance—dollar stalking and money raids; and the frown on his lean, old face began to fade. It was only for a moment. The frown came back darker than ever as his eyes fell on the closed door

to his right. A door of brown wood, it looked like any other door. It opened into the private office of Hiram Jenks, senior partner in the firm of Jenks & Macraw, bankers.

For a while J. B. stood staring at the door. There was perplexity on his face, anger in his cold, reddish eyes. He went slowly across the carpeted floor and knocked on the panel.

It was merely habit—automatic habit—this polite rap with his knuckles. Mr. Jenks was not there; and he knew Mr. Jenks was not there. Turning the handle, J. B. pushed open the door and entered the empty room.

It was another rich and orderly room, much like his own office. Here, too, packed away in the safe and in mahogany boxes, were the trophies of good hunting; but the room had a look of its own. On the broad library table were metal-topped inkwells

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that glittered in the afternoon light. A large gilded picture frame near by shared their splendor. In front of the picture was a crystal vase, in which a rose lolled on its rotting stem. J. B. grunted contemptuously—perhaps at the picture, perhaps at the rose.

The photograph was one of the many photographs of Mr. Jenks that were in the room, clinging to the walls or posing on stand-up frames on the tops of pieces of furniture. Some of them pictured Mr. Jenks as he was in the last century, plump and forthcoming, wearing large side whiskers. Others showed how the side whiskers had been chipped away little by little, and how the plumpness had fallen out of Mr. Jenks's face, with a bald spot widening on the top of his head.

The photograph on the table was unquestionably the latest. It depicted a smart old man in a braided coat and wing collar. By some amazing victory of the wig maker's art, the bald patch had disappeared under a toupee which was not to be distinguished from the hair that still lingered on the skull.

There was peevish contempt on J. B.'s thin lips as he faced the portrait—and the rotting rose; but in his cold eyes there was something else—a look of suspicion. He muttered to himself, in a way he had. Then, abruptly, he sat down in his partner's chair and tried the table drawers.

The one in the middle opened. Everything was in order—papers neatly docketed; letters with their significant memoranda; all the indications of business carefully projected or dispatched. Old J. B. scanned them rapidly, and put them back again. The other drawers were locked.

Before he went back to his own room, J. B., yielding to an unexpected impulse of disdain, jerked the rotting rose out of the vase and threw it on the floor.

As he sat down at his own table, there came a rap at his outer door. A smallish, oldish man came in and shut the door behind him.

"It's Ogle & Brine, the lawyers, sir."

"H-m! Both of them?"

"No, Mr. Macraw—it's Mr. Ogle himself. They've been coming, or telephoning, or sending every day for a week, asking for Mr. Jenks; and now Mr. Ogle wants to know if you will see him, sir."

J. B. reflected for a moment. At last he said:

"All right, Pickering—let him come in."

Mr. Ogle nearly filled the doorway. He was huge and fat. A broad, affable smile displayed the gold in his teeth. He moved slowly and walked wide, like a duck.

J. B. examined him coldly. From the perfumed head to the flat feet, the big, smiling lawyer was just the kind of man he did not like. He did not know him; he did not care to know him; but above all things he wanted news of his partner, Hiram Jenks, for whom Ogle & Brine had been asking so often. Perhaps this fat man held the secret of Hiram's disappearance—the unaccountable disappearance of an orderly banker of seventy, who, promising to be "back in a few days," had not been heard of for a fortnight.

J. B. studied the fat man with new interest; and suddenly it seemed that in this fellow's hugeness and softness and slowness there was something menacing. It was a vague impression, but it was enough to put his keen old wits on guard—as if some one was trying to take a dollar from him.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," Ogle said; "but I must get in touch with Mr. Jenks. It is very important."

"It is his personal business, I presume?" the banker asked quietly.

"Entirely personal and very important—for Mr. Jenks. If you will be good enough to tell me where I can see him," Mr. Ogle went on, "I shall be very grateful to you, Mr. Macraw—and he will be, also, I am sure."

"I can only suggest that you should write to Mr. Jenks and ask him to give you an appointment."

Mr. Ogle smiled, more affable than ever.

"We have written, telephoned, telegraphed, and—if our messages reach Mr. Jenks—he has not replied."

"As it is a private matter of his own," J. B. said pleasantly, "I cannot be of any assistance, I fear."

"But his address?"

"There again, Mr. Ogle, I have no authority to give it."

"I see!" Ogle said thoughtfully. "Of course! But if you will be kind enough to tell him we are anxious to communicate with him—that will do."

J. B. gave his assent; but even as he promised to tell Hiram, he wondered when he would tell him, and where. He showed Ogle out, and even shook the lawyer's hand—the one that had the most rings on it.

During the interview he had studied that fat, smiling face, but he had not been able to read anything in it. What seemed clear-est was that Ogle did not know where Hiram was—indeed, that he was anxious to find out that very thing. As to what his partner had to do with this kind of criminal lawyer—what shifty legal business tied them together—was more than J. B. could conceive. He had thought at first that it might have something to do with Hiram's disappearance, but Ogle's ignorance seemed honest enough.

"There can't be anything wrong," J. B. told himself, but he didn't like it.

It was not that his partner's absence mattered so much. There was no reason why Mr. Jenks should not take a holiday. One fairly important business deal would have to be held over, but probably it could be held.

Of late Hiram had broken away from the treadmill now and then, and to J. B. this had seemed, at worst, merely a sign of levity. And there were other things—that wig on his head, and the rose on his table; but it was not like Hiram—it was not even like this new Hiram, whose old age had broken out in wigs and flowers—to go away with the casual remark that he would be gone for a few days, and then to vanish.

J. B. had known and trusted his partner for half a century. It was not that he distrusted him now; but it was a strange thing, and he did not like mysteries. There was nothing he could do. He could not advertise for a lost Hiram, as one urges a runaway schoolgirl to return and be forgiven. He could not put detectives on his partner's trail, as if he were a fugitive from justice.

Probably old Hiram was amusing himself in his own way. Certainly he was old enough, J. B. told himself, to do as he pleased; but he might have sent some word to the bank. No message had come from the missing partner, and nothing could be learned at his decorous bachelor apartment—save the valet's polite:

"Mr. Jenks has not returned, sir."

And what did this Ogle person, who smelled of the criminal courts, want with his partner, J. B. asked himself? Perhaps, after all, Ogle knew something of Hiram's disappearance. His pretended ignorance might be bluff.

J. B. was perplexed and angry. He was in this mood when Mr. Lane, the cashier of Jenks & Macraw, entered from the office.

"Well?" he said.

Mr. Lane was embarrassed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Macraw, I am not quite sure—but I thought you might like to know—"

He hesitated and stared at J. B. through his bifocal glasses in a timid sort of way.

"Well! What?"

"It is a check of Mr. Jenks's, sir, on his private account. It has just been cleared, sir, and—"

"Well!" old J. B. repeated viciously. "What about it?"

"It is for a hundred thousand dollars, sir."

"What of it?" the banker asked, in the same impatient tone.

"I thought I would mention it."

"Well, you have mentioned it."

Mr. Lane laid the check on the table. J. B. did not look at it.

"That's all," he said.

Even when Mr. Lane had left the room, he did not take up the canceled check which lay face down on the table.

It required a little courage to interfere with old Hiram's private affairs, as J. B., after a lifetime of give and take, well knew. Hiram Jenks was not only peppery and violent, but he had an unpleasant way of standing on his confounded dignity. He had always required a great deal of handling; but the present circumstances justified interference.

It was not an ordinary payment, or it would not have agitated the calm cashier. Old bankers do not dispense such sums in holidaying. There under his hand, J. B. thought, might be the secret of Hiram's mysterious disappearance. He had a right to know. Anyway, he decided, prying is less indecent than disappearing.

"If it's that Ogle person—"

With this thought in his mind, J. B. took up the check. It was five days old in date. It was, as Mr. Lane had said, for one hundred thousand dollars. It was drawn to the order of "self," and indorsed "Hiram Jenks."

II

THERE are certain conventional ways of looking for a missing man, and J. B. thought of them all.

He put by the idea of making a search in the hospitals. In the first place, there was nothing the matter with Hiram's physical well-being, except his spleen. He was

an alert and lusty old man. He had certainly been well enough to write out a check within the last few days, so evidently he had not been knocked on the head or carried to a hospital.

Of course, Hiram might be in trouble of another sort. J. B. did not want to appeal to the police, and blow up a scandal; and, like most wealthy men, he had a well founded distaste for private detectives. He knew what his partner thought of them. Indeed, more than once, of late, Hiram had grown eloquent and convincing in his description of the habits, morals, and future abiding place of private detectives. They were out of the question. Moreover, J. B. had confidence in his own ability to do pretty much anything he set out to do.

Upon leaving the bank he went directly to Hiram's apartment in a quiet street uptown. He questioned the valet once more, without avail. If that soft-voiced, polite menial knew where his master was, he also knew how to keep the secret to himself; but J. B. did not think he knew. There was no use trying the club again; and yet there might be a chance there.

"Is Shanahan about?" J. B. asked abruptly.

"I think I can find him, sir," the valet replied gently.

"I'll wait."

It was in his partner's library that he waited. The room was a pleasant one, with books and easy chairs and an oil portrait of Hiram—without the new wig—over the mantelpiece. There was a red portière at the door.

The portière was pushed aside by a stocky young fellow in black clothes, cap in hand. He took a few steps into the room and stood still. To J. B.'s discriminating eye he looked as efficient and unconcerned as a bull terrier. His face was pleasant enough, in spite of the fact that old lightweight battles, when Shanahan was in the ring, had battered it up a bit.

"Sit down, Shanahan," J. B. said.

He was wondering why Hiram should have picked out a man like that. He disliked that aggressive look.

"Thank you, Mr. Macraw."

Shanahan put his cap in his pocket and sat down near the door.

"Has Mr. Jenks had the motor car out lately?"

"No, Mr. Macraw."

"When did he have it out last?"

Shanahan took his time before answering.

"Mr. Jenks has been out of town, you know, sir, for some weeks," he said at last.

"Out of town? Did he tell you he was going out of town?"

"I don't remember that he said anything about it," Shanahan replied.

"Look here, Dan, you've been with my partner for eight years. You know I don't ask silly questions. Do you know where he is? I'll tell you frankly that I don't know what has become of him, and I'm anxious."

Shanahan smiled. It was an outbreak of friendliness which did not appeal to J. B.'s sense of what was due him, but he held his peace.

"I've heard you've been trying to find out something from that he-housemaid out there," Shanahan said; "and now it's me. I take my orders from Mr. Jenks, but that doesn't mean I don't want to help you out, if I can—only I don't go against orders. That's why Mr. Jenks and I have got along for eight years—and that takes some doing, Mr. Macraw. I've had no orders, so I can answer your question. Where is he? You can search me!"

"You don't know where he is?"

"I've not had word or wag from him in over two weeks. That's why I'm here. I thought Timmins might have heard from him, but that he-housemaid—"

"I know that my partner depends upon you, Dan, and so do I. Now he should have been back ten days ago. He wouldn't fail to let me know, unless"—J. B. emphasized his words—"something prevented him. He may need my help—and yours."

"You do know how to talk to me, Mr. Macraw," Shanahan said approvingly; "and I'll tell you. Perhaps he doesn't want to be found—even by you and me. He's a pretty wise old bird, and can take care of himself, believe me. I wouldn't go beating the bushes for him, Mr. Macraw, if I were you. He might not like it; and if he didn't, he'd say it so there'd be no mistake. Better wait till birdie flies home!"

"This is nothing to joke about, Shanahan. What are you driving at?"

"Trying to relieve your anxiety, Mr. Macraw. I've seen her—just by chance. Of course, if Mr. Jenks had confided in me, I'd have said nothing, even to you; but I found it out myself. She's a nice girl, and he's kind to her. I've seen 'em together."

The rose on Hiram's office table, the new

toupee, the braided coat, came back to J. B.'s memory—and a jauntier way Hiram had of holding himself of late. He had always thought that Hiram's eccentricities were due to the fact that he had grown old before he grew ripe; and now there were many indications that he was trying to bring back a belated youth.

A woman, eh? A girl, if what Shanahan said were true! That had not been Hiram's way, at least so far as he knew. In fact, J. B. had an impression that in his real youth Hiram had had one costly and terrifying experience with what is called love, and had been frightened away from it ever since.

"Who is this—lady, Shanahan?"

"You've got me, Mr. Macraw. I don't know who she is, but she'll never get lost in New York. She and Broadway are little sisters."

"Can't you find her?"

Shanahan shook his head.

"No, no, I'm not looking for her—not if Mr. Jenks is within calling distance. I don't live so close to my wad I'm afraid of losing my job; but I like my present boss. He suits me. No, Mr. Macraw! I'll be over at the garage, on the job, when Mr. Jenks whistles for the car—not out in Broadway looking for high heels!"

Shanahan grinned. He was seeing amusement in the situation. He was picturing old J. B., aged and lank and self-complacent, ferreting about after his errant partner and a pair of high heels.

"And where would you look for him, Mr. Macraw?" he went on, when J. B. did not speak. "It's a big old town, and full of holes. See here, I haven't a right to tell you anything more, but I'll give you a tip."

"In confidence, Shanahan. I will not betray you."

"Give me away? Why, I'll tell Mr. Jenks as soon as I see him. He and I run on the level. Thank you all the same, but I don't need any protection, Mr. Macraw. I'm telling you all I can to help you because I have a good heart. My mother is Irish."

"I shall be very grateful, Dan."

"Well, it's this—for the last few months Mr. Jenks has been growing fond of Twelfth Street and Fifth Avenue. And it's not the church he's loving, at that. On the way uptown from the bank he'd get out of the car there and stand—just watch-

ing me and the car until we were out of sight. That's all I can say, Mr. Macraw."

Shanahan stood up and took his cap out of his pocket. J. B. did not call him back when, after a moment, he backed through the red portière. He went over to Hiram's cigar cabinet, selected one of the cigars he knew of old, lit it carefully, and went down to the street, where his motor car waited.

"Fifth Avenue and Twelfth Street," he told his chauffeur.

He got out at the church—that was what Hiram had done. He sent away his car and watched it out of sight. A rather strange feeling came over him. Something seemed to tug at him, and what tugged was more than curiosity—more than the kind of impatient anger against Hiram which had been with him all day.

He had set out to do something in order to find his missing partner—to do something—to go somewhere. He felt that he was not acting entirely upon his own volition. To be sure, he was going where he wanted to go, but all the time he was traveling down a road that had been prepared for him. It was as if a hand had reached out and touched him on the shoulder, while a voice whispered:

"This way—now turn to the right!"

It was not an entirely unknown experience. In times when the market ran riot, J. B. often had premonitions upon which he could count. He believed in this shadowy sixth sense of intuition, although he had never spoken of it—not even to Hiram; and now he yielded to the feeling that drove him on.

He turned out of the avenue westward, into Eleventh Street.

It was one of the large, long days of autumn, and sunlight still lingered over the town. There was heat in the air as well as light, and the house windows were open. Old J. B. walked slowly, musingly, yielding to the direction of the unseen hand on his shoulder.

He was passing one of the old-fashioned houses, the window curtains of which were partly drawn, when he heard a harsh and violent laugh, and then, clearly spoken, the words:

"Hello, Hiram!"

The voice was metallic. It was like the voice of a rusty phonograph; and then there came once more the savage and mocking laughter.

J. B. stopped in his tracks and looked at

the house. It was a small house of red brick, which dated from far back in the last century, but had been smartened up into modernity. A dozen steps, built over an area, led up to the front door. There was no plate on the door.

It was, indeed, one of the quiet little homes, domestic, familiar, and anonymous, which in mid Victorian days housed an unostentatious race of New Yorkers, long since gone to their fathers. In spite of new paint, it had kept all its last-century air of implacable decency.

Without haste and without hesitation, J. B. went up the steps. Even as he rang the bell, he seemed to hear once more an echo of grim laughter; but this time it was a sort of chuckle—derisive, contemptuous.

When a maid opened the door, J. B. did not know at all what he should say, or for whom he should ask; and yet in some way he was determined to find out the meaning of that sudden outcry:

"Hello, Hiram!"

The little maid waited expectantly, a trifle awed, it seemed, by the appearance of this harsh, lean, upright old man, who stood staring at her with his hard old eyes.

"Take my card," he said at last.

It bore merely his name—J. B. Macraw.

He was shown into a reception room at the right of the narrow hall. There was not much light, for the curtains partially hid the open windows; but in one of them, on a tall wooden perch, squatted a green parrot. Upon J. B.'s entrance the bird cocked its head to one side and laughed. Then very distinctly it repeated:

"Hello, Hiram—hello!"

With this preface, the parrot swore emphatically.

"Naughty! Naughty!" said a high-pitched voice from the doorway.

A woman came in. She was tall; J. B. thought she would have been as tall as he was, had she not stooped a good deal. She had a long, hollow face with thin lips and sunken eyes. It was not that she looked ill; it was as if she had been worn down, thin and hard, by the attrition of unkindly years. She might have been fifty years old, or sixty.

She said nothing, and waited for the visitor to speak.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," he began; "but that bird—"

He paused. The woman did not help him out.

"You have my card—I am Mr. Macraw," he went on. "As I was passing the window, that bird called out to me: 'Hello, Hiram!' Now that interested me, for reasons which I shall explain; so I have taken the liberty, madam. What did that bird mean by calling out 'Hello, Hiram'?"

"If you'll tell me your reasons," the woman said coldly, "I might understand what you are talking about."

"Hiram who?" J. B. persisted. "Hello, Hiram who?"

The woman was silent. She seemed timid rather than unfriendly, and she was evidently impressed by the dominating tone the old banker had begun to assume. He turned from her to the parrot. The bird glanced sidewise at him; and in the black, malicious eyes there was such a look of uncanny intelligence—such a look of complicity in evil—that J. B. was startled. They stared at each other, eye to eye—the parrot's eyes like black anthracite staring knowingly into the man's round, startled eyes, which were the color of jasper.

"Hiram who?" he asked.

"Jenks," said the parrot, and laughed.

J. B.'s legs collapsed under him. He sank into a chair and sat there, while the woman slipped out of the room.

III

For a while there was silence in the room. The man and the bird stared at each other, and neither of them spoke. Night began to fall, the room darkened, and still J. B. sat there motionless in his chair, his hat on his knees.

After what seemed to him a very long time he heard whispering voices in the hall, stifled laughter, and then quick little footsteps, rapping the parquet floor. He glanced up.

What he saw first was a shadowy hand. It hovered round the lintel of the doorway. Suddenly an electric light flashed up in the room, and he saw a slender girl in a dark blue gown. She was smiling, and her eyes were bright.

"So Coco told you!" she said, and with this she laughed outright.

"Yes—that bird," J. B. answered, as he got to his feet and stood looking down at her without approval.

"It's Mr. Macraw, isn't it? Oh, please sit down! I'll take this chair. I am Madelon Starr; but perhaps you knew—or didn't you? It's so funny!"

Miss Starr had hazel eyes and a white skin, coppery hair and a mouth made for laughter. As she sat down and crossed her silk-covered ankles, J. B. noticed that the heels of her little shoes were high. He thought angrily of Shanahan's "little sister of Broadway."

His first impression had been that she was gay and good; but he distrusted his first impressions of women, especially when young; for he had usually found women just the opposite of what they seemed to be. Trusting to women was poor work, he thought.

She prattled on as if her light talk was meant to cover something—her surprise, perhaps, her dismay at his appearance in the quiet little reception room.

"Of course, you are not at all a stranger, Mr. Macraw. I have heard so much about you! And the song! 'A' the wild Macraws are coming!' So I knew, of course, that I should see you some day, because the Macraws do come, don't they? Only you aren't a wild Macraw—or are you? I wonder!"

"Who told you about me?" J. B. asked bluntly.

"Why, Uncle Hiram, of course!"

She leaned forward and made her eyes large as if with astonishment.

"Of course! Who else could it be? And hasn't he told you about me?" she asked wonderingly.

"Uncle Hiram!" J. B. repeated. "Your uncle? That won't do, Miss—er—"

He fumbled for her name.

"Madelon Starr," she said, helping him out. "Of course, he isn't my real uncle. I only call him that. I couldn't very well call him 'Mr. Jenks,' such a dear kind friend—or could I?"

She was making herself very girlish and naive, but J. B. felt that behind this apparent childish gayety there was something bold and careless and strong. She was twenty-two years old, he decided, and looked that age. While she chattered away he had been watching her, and had seen a great deal. He saw that she was studying him as carefully as he studied her, and that her self-confidence was perfectly unbroken. She was a good-natured girl, he reflected, but she knew what she was about. He rather liked her. There was a sort of fascination about her; and she was no fool.

"I suppose, Miss Starr, it is all right to call him 'Uncle Hiram,' if he doesn't ob-

ject. In fact, I'm glad you know him so well, for now you can tell me what I want to know."

"Yes?"

"Where is Hiram Jenks?"

"O-oh, Mr. Macraw! And you don't know? And I'm so anxious about him! Just think—I haven't seen him for two weeks, and he is so good to me, and so faithful! I've wondered and wondered what could have kept him away. I thought of course it was that dreadful business you and he are so interested in. Oh, Mr. Macraw, what has become of Uncle Hiram?"

Madelon talked in italics and made little gestures that hinted of the theater, or of a dramatic school.

"I've come to ask you that question, Miss Starr. I'll tell you the truth—I do not know where Mr. Jenks is, and you do."

She drew back a little, for the old banker was frowning at her. Then, with the simplicity of a little girl, she said quietly:

"Do you think that is telling the truth?"

"I'm not here to argue," J. B. said roughly. "I want information, and you can give it to me. Mr. Jenks has not been seen or heard of by his closest friends for more than two weeks. I now learn that he is a familiar of this house—"

"Oh!"

"He is 'Uncle Hiram' here, isn't he? The least you can do is to relieve my anxiety and enable me to see him at once. Mr. Jenks is not the kind of man who can disappear, without—well, without my doing something about it."

"You mustn't be cross, Mr. Macraw," Madelon said, after a short pause, during which she had taken on a serious air. "I didn't understand. I see now that you are really anxious about him. I am, too; but I thought you came here for something else—perhaps to annoy me, because—well, you know, because your partner has been such a dear good friend to me. Indeed he has! Mrs. Dowsing will tell you. That was Mrs. Dowsing you saw awhile ago, you know. Honest, I haven't seen Uncle Hiram for two weeks, and I've been worried—and then your coming! I was afraid of you."

"Miss Starr, I don't want to pry into your business, or Hiram's—I mean Mr. Jenks's business. If you don't know where he is, you don't, and that's all; but can't you help me? When you saw him last, did he tell you of his plans—where he was going—when he meant to return?"

"Nothing! He just said good-by, and told me to work as hard as I could."

"Work?"

"My music, you know. He is interested in my voice, and thinks I shall succeed. It was Sunday afternoon, and I thought I should see him the next day. He almost always looked in on his way uptown, and sometimes we dined together; but I've not seen him since that day—not a note from him, or flowers, or anything. Really, Mr. Macraw, that's all I know. It is the truth. You believe me—or do you?"

"I think I do," replied J. B. "Perhaps I do."

So far as he could see, there was no reason why she should be deceiving him. Evidently she was a folly of old Hiram's, whose recent philandering with youth might well explain his interest in this talkative, attractive girl, with her music, and her frank and almost childish gayety. It was a logical kind of folly that went with the new wig and the rose.

Other old millionaires had now and then felt called upon to educate young girls for stage or opera. It seemed to take them that way. They recaptured, perhaps, a little vicarious youth by associating with the young voices, the laughter, the artifice and ambitions of stage-struck girls. J. B. had heard of that sort of thing.

It might well be that Madelon Starr knew nothing of Hiram's disappearance. Probably she was really as anxious as she pretended to be. She must feel as if she had lost her pocketbook.

J. B. tried once more.

"You can tell me nothing, then?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Macraw, but I can't."

"When you hear from him, or see him, you will tell him I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance?"

He had meant to say something more, but the little housemaid had entered and was standing irresolute near her mistress. J. B. started to get up, when he heard a sharp note in Madelon's voice, which roused his always ready suspicion, and he sank back in his chair.

"Natta?"

"She is waiting," the housemaid said softly.

"No, she is not waiting—she is here!"

A rich, deep voice spoke from the doorway, and a woman, heavy and massive as a piece of furniture, advanced into the room.

"It is seven o'clock, and I am here. Where else should I be? This is where I had to be at this day and hour and minute. It is my destiny—and yours," she said gloomily. "And his," she added, looking steadily at Mr. Macraw, who had risen.

Madelon was apologetic.

"All right, Natta! I only meant you to wait a minute."

"I never wait," Natta answered darkly.

She was a tall, thickset woman, powerful, with great shoulders and large hands and feet. She was dressed in black, and wore no hat. Her face was heavy-featured, coarse, almost masculine; and yet in some strange way it was not only sympathetic, but even attractive.

Perhaps the strangeness came from her eyes. They were wide-set, staring eyes, pale blue in color. They formed an extraordinary contrast to the strong, thick hair, intensely black, which was bobbed around her ears and across her forehead. Self-assured, stolidly formidable, she towered over Madelon Starr and dominated the room.

"You asked me to come. Now I understand. It is the hour—I feel it. Sit down!" she said, suddenly fixing her pale eyes on old J. B.

"He is just going," Madelon told her, impatiently.

J. B. resumed his seat. Without paying any attention to Madelon, the big woman drew up a chair to the center table, near which the others were sitting, and sat down. She had a large bag of black velvet, fastened with a ribbon. This she began to unknot, talking all the time in her deep, vibrating voice.

"Everything that happens is a prophecy—especially in human affairs. That is why this man is here, and also it is why you do not want him to be here at this very moment. Prophecy! This is the hour and the moment. Why should it be at this very moment that you summoned me to try and find the man you have lost? And another old man sitting here at this very moment, listening, prying, wondering! I have told you before, Madelon Starr, you are one of those to whom anything can happen—anything!" she said somberly, fastening her pale eyes on the girl's face.

J. B. caught a look in Madelon's eyes that gave him food for thought. The mere presence of the huge woman had seemed to oppress her. She was cowed and afraid,

and, anxious as she was that he should go, she had not dared oppose Natta's calm decree that he should remain. She looked like a child both frightened and annoyed; but now her lips tightened, and the look that came into her eyes was almost indefinable. It was enigmatic, and yet J. B. read in it both anxiety and fear. Was it anxiety for old Hiram's fate, and fear that she might lose his protection? So swiftly the look passed away that he was not quite sure.

"You are seeking information from this—lady?" he said to Madelon. "Is it about Hiram Jenks?"

Before she could reply there came a scream from the window.

"Hello, Hiram! Hello, hello, hello, Hiram!"

The parrot shrugged up first one shoulder and then the other, and cocked a malicious eye at old J. B. as if it was taking him into some unholy kind of confidence. Madelon jumped up and threw a cloth over perch and parrot. From beneath the cloth the bird's oaths finally rumbled away into silence.

Natta, meanwhile, had taken from the bag a square piece of blue velvet, which she laid out upon the table. Dipping again into the bag, she produced a crystal ball wrapped in yellow silk, and a little tripod made of some sort of greenish metal. She spread the yellow silk carefully over the blue velvet, and upon it she erected the tripod.

Lastly she extracted from the bag a triangular crust of bread. This she placed on the yellow silk, to the right of the tripod; and as she did so, she announced in her resonant voice:

"Bread is very potent. It possesses a protective magic against evil forces."

With this Natta closed her eyes and sat for a while in deep meditation, motionless. Madelon had relapsed into a quiet mood, almost one of apathy. Old J. B. was leaning forward, examining the fantastic edifice the sybil had erected—the velvet mat, the yellow silk, and the tripod, uplifting the bright globe of rock crystal. He was amused, but he gave no sign of it.

Indeed, behind his amusement there was interest of a kind. Vaguely he remembered his old grandmother, who would sit in the dusk staring into a cairngorm. Always there lingers in the man of Scottish blood—even though for generations he has been

exiled from stern and wild Caledonia—a half-hearted belief in second sight; and J. B., although he had been brought up in a prudent dread of the supernatural, had to acknowledge to himself that he had not wholly lost his hereditary instinct for the marvelous.

Moreover, he had a dislike for white or pale blue stones. Diamonds, as well as rock crystals, sapphires, opals, and moonstones shared in this dislike of his. There might be some reason for this antipathy. He did not know. Anyway, he was not quite ready to laugh outright at the sybil and her sphere of white stone.

He prided himself on his scientific liberalism. After all, there was possibly something in it. The brain pictures evoked by the crystal might have a psychic value, even if they were only subconscious; and the woman was impressive. She was formidably impressive in her stolid way.

She seemed sincere, precisely as a square-hewn log of wood seems sincere. There was sincerity even in the way she sat in her chair—solid, ample, upright.

Natta drew a deep breath and opened her eyes.

"Give me your hand—the other one," she said to Madelon. "Did he give you this?"

She stripped a ring from the girl's finger. It was, in fact, old Hiram's ring. He had given her many things, from flowers and a parrot to gowns and jewels. It was a heavy ring, with a large stone of pale bluish color, crossed by three lines, which produced the effect of a star that moved and lived in the gem with some queer life of its own.

"By Heavens, it's Hiram's star sapphire!" J. B. said to himself.

He knew how Hiram prized it, and he could not bring himself to believe that it had been freely given to this girl—no, in spite of the fact that she claimed it.

Natta was holding the ring against her forehead, between her thick, black eyebrows. At last she laid it down on the square of blue velvet, near the piece of bread. Still sitting erect, she began to stare with her wide blue eyes—eyes pale as the sapphire—into the crystal ball. Her lips moved.

"I am seeking for the man—seeking—" she whispered.

Little by little her face changed. The coarseness went out of it, and it looked younger. Slowly there came over it a veil

of trance-like passivity—something at once luminous and shadowy. She began to speak again, but in a small distinct voice unlike her own.

"Seeking!" she repeated. "He is not far away. Now the mist comes, and in the mist I shall see him. Oh, he does not move! He is still and motionless—lying on something white—a bed; but he is not ill. He is a strong old man, but he cannot move his legs or his hands. He is thinking of another old man—the man who sits beside my body in this room. His thoughts go to this old man—eager thoughts, angry thoughts. What does it mean? What does he want?"

There was an interval of silence. Then she cried out:

"My God, what is this? What is it? The mist is fading. Now it comes again, and in the mist I see the man. He moves. He is very strong. He stands up. It is in a room. I cannot see his face. Ah—now! Now I see him, but he is changed—changed. There is a smile on his face. He is thinking of Madelon Starr. His thoughts go to her. It fades! It fades!"

Again she paused. When her voice came once more, it was feeble and low.

"But he will come to you—to both of you—or you will go to him—"

The sybil groaned, shuddered, swayed. Then came harsh laughter—laughter that broke off abruptly; and, speaking to J. B., she said rapidly:

"You shall see him, old man, but will you know him? Will you know him?"

With that she reeled forward and collapsed over the table. She lay there, a sprawling figure of a woman, flabby, heaving with labored breath.

Madelon cowered in her chair, white and speechless. J. B. watched her, scrutinizing her with suspicious but not unkindly eyes.

IV

THE dignified brown house near Gramercy Park was a widowed house. Long ago Mrs. J. B. Macraw had gone to a world where it is extremely probable that the chief topic of conversation is not money getting. There had been a little girl, but after a short stay in the dignified house she, too, had gone away; and J. B. was left alone.

He was not unhappy. The bank and the world of finance held unfailing interest for him. He found as much affection as his nature needed in his friendship with his

aging partner. He was lavish of his dislikes, and among them he included people—people in general, especially women. Books held him. He liked books—especially those that had to do with science in a popular and chatty way. He also read a good deal of history. It was chiefly the imaginative kind of history that Macaulay devised for getting even with the dead. He read Robertson, too—because he was a Scot—and believed in him. His good cigars made for happiness.

"There is nothing like a good cigar to keep a man satisfied and contented with life," he once told Hiram. "It's a fact, I believe, that no cigar smoker ever committed suicide."

Moreover, when science and history wearied him, and he was tired of playing his games of patience, he always had his pet hobby to fall back upon.

It was a hobby like any other. In the beginning it had stolen upon him unaware. It had pretended to be a good-humored folly—a mere idle way of passing the time, harmless as a game of patience, agreeable as a cigar.

One day he had occasion to look over the jewels that his wife had left behind her when she went away to a moneyless world. What particularly attracted his attention was a sort of amulet hung on a thin gold chain. He had never seen Mrs. Macraw wear it. He wondered why she had kept it hidden. She was not a secretive woman—or was she? Perhaps she was. Old J. B. never knew much about her, and what he once knew he had forgotten.

He held the jewel up to the light and examined it. It was a blue beetle, the deep blue of lapis lazuli, and on its flat belly a queer sign was engraved. The old banker did not know what it was. A jeweler to whom he showed it told him it was a scarab; that it was an imitation, made in some German factory and sold in Egypt to the unwary tourist. All this was true, but the blue beetle was more than an imitation antique. It was a hobby—an implacable hobby, which fastened on J. B. and was not to be shaken off.

If there were imitation scarabs, there must be real ones; and J. B. began to collect. Funeral scarabs, eye scarabs, signets, and scaraboids—he hunted them in the same relentless way he hunted dollars. He loved them for their value. Perhaps he also loved them for their rarity. He was their

victim rather than their owner. They were his hobby, and his hobby rode him.

The collection grew; it became famous in a certain quasi-learned set the world over. In far-away obscure lands bearded men talked of "Mr. Macraw's collection," and laid deep plans against his dollars. It was, indeed, a hobby worth while.

The back drawing-room of the old brown house was J. B.'s library. There were shelves for his volumes of science and history. A separate bookcase, broad and tall, held his books—scores of them—about his hobby. The home of the scarabs was in a steel safe set in the wall, but they took the air in a cabinet lined with flat satin, which stood near one of the windows.

It was Sunday afternoon, and they were displaying themselves in all their glory of ruby and amethyst, lapis lazuli and jasper, when a visitor—a pleasant-faced, rather corpulent man—was shown into the front drawing-room.

The many-colored gems beckoned to the visitor through the open doors. When the servant had left him alone, he went toward them as if drawn by a cord. He stood in the light of the window, his plump, white hands behind his back, his brilliant eyes fastened on the scarabs. His face was lighted up with sheer joy; and it was thus old J. B., as he hurried in, saw him.

Mr. Macraw had entered softly, for all his haste, and he paused for a moment in the doorway between the rooms. What he saw was a professional-looking man, well dressed in black clothes. The visitor was vigorous and solid, and might have been forty years of age, or a trifle more. What was most impressive was his head. J. B. thought he had never seen such a head. It was powerful; it was massive. The forehead was large and high, and seemed even bigger than it was, because the thick, abundant hair was brushed away from it.

At first J. B. had thought he was professional-looking; on second thought he set him down as something even more dangerous—an artist, a musician, a philosopher, perhaps a man of genius—human types that old J. B. distrusted and disliked. The dominant impression the collector of scarabs received from this glittering, dark stranger was that of prodigious intellectual force—a power tranquil, confident, and sure of itself. He did not like it.

Standing there in silence, giving no sign of his presence, J. B. watched the man.

Suddenly the visitor whirled around as if some one had shouted in his ear. His face was radiant.

"By the gods of Egypt!" he exclaimed. "This is wonderful! It is the most wonderful heart scarab in existence. It is the *ab* scarab of Sebak-em-Saf, who lived twenty-five hundred years before our era began. That much I have made out. Wonderful!"

There was reverence in his voice—not for the old banker and his pyramid of millions, but for the beetle-shaped piece of green jasper inscribed with the seal of a king dead these four thousand years and more. Flattery of himself or his millions would have served merely to button up the banker's pockets; but this outburst of genuine admiration for the pride of his collection went straight to his heart, which was about as hard—except where Hiram Jenks was concerned—as the heart scarab itself.

It was almost impossible for J. B. to distrust a man who showed a real knowledge of his hobby. Where it was concerned, all the barriers of his dislike fell down. He couldn't help it. Men of the same hobby—even if it is merely that of alcoholic drink—always swing together. His heart warmed toward the stranger, in spite of the man's shininess and his hair; but he kept his air of calm self-complacency.

He crossed the room and unlocked the cabinet.

"You know something about scarabs," he said. "That is the scarab of Sebak-em-Saf."

He held it out in the palm of his hand. It was a gorgeous scarab, heart-shaped, the head and body carved out of the green jasper, the legs of gold.

"Glorious!" the visitor exclaimed. "I have often heard of it. It was found near Thebes, was it not? Yes!"

Their two heads were bent over the piece of stone. Their voices were confidential. They talked of dates and weights, of car-touches and inscriptions, of something they called a symbol.

"The heart symbol."

"Yes, it was buried with the heart."

"Symbol of immortality."

"I first learned of it in Rome."

And J. B. told how he had battled for it, outbidding rival collectors, scheming against governmental museums. He chuckled over his victory.

"Glorious!" his visitor repeated. "But

this won't do, Mr. Macraw. Close the cabinet, or I cannot think of anything but those scarabs of yours; and I've come to see you on an important—"

He broke off with a sudden exclamation of delight. J. B. had taken out another of the world-old gems. He held it in his hand, and his lean face shone with pride—the obscure, covetous pride of the hobbyist. It was a scarab cut from a matrix emerald, grass-colored, luminous.

"The youth scarab!"

"Yes, it cost me—"

"I knew it! It was found in a tomb at Abd-el-Kurna—on a woman's neck."

"Mummy," said old J. B.

"But do you know, oh, do you know? It is the scarab of eternal youth—not rebirth into another life, but rebirth into youth. It is the prophetic emerald, which brings back youth!"

The visitor quivered with excitement. His hands were never silent. He looked at the green stone as if it were the home of mystery and hope.

"The gift of Thoth—youth everlasting!" he cried.

"I didn't know about that," said J. B. dryly; "but I know I could have bought a king or two for what I paid for it. They were all after it—London, Paris, Rome; and I got it."

"I am glad it is in your collection. It should be here—in the New World—in our land of youth. I congratulate you—and New York. Wonderful! But I must ask your pardon, really—time, you know! It's a mere convention, of course, but still we have to reckon with it; and I came for another purpose—fascinating as your collection is. If you can give me a moment—I am Dr. Cree—Dr. Ira Cree, you know, and—"

"This one," interrupted J. B. "Do you know what that is? Not that one—that's a scaraboid—the one above it. Eh? Look at it!"

He laid it on the back of his hand and held it up. It, too, was an emerald, but much larger than the youth scarab, deeper and richer in color, and heavy with carved gold. On it were two figures deeply engraved. At the top of the stone was the sacred beetle, and beneath it, emerging from the green emerald, was—a parrot.

The eyes of the two men met over the scarab.

"A parrot?" said Dr. Cree soberly.

"A parrot," J. B. repeated. "It came from the jewels of the Sultan of Turkey—the old one, Abdul Hamid. It was stolen by the Young Turks and pawned in Paris. I got it."

"What does it mean?"

"Protection," replied J. B.

"It didn't protect the old Sultan."

"It did—until he was robbed of it."

"Extraordinary! This collection—I could spend a lifetime over it!"

"I have," said J. B.

He fondled the scarab, turned it to the sunlight, stared into it.

"But not to-day—I cannot linger now, Mr. Macraw," Dr. Cree said resolutely.

"A friend of yours, Mr. Macraw, has requested me—"

"Have you seen the *tet* scarab? It is—"

"No, no, not to-day! Permit me, Mr. Macraw—I cannot stay. Your friend—"

"What friend?" J. B. asked, putting back the scarabs with reluctance, and locking them up, as if he was putting away and locking up all his interests in life.

"What friend?" he repeated. "What do you want?"

No sooner had he turned his back on his hobby than his original dislike for this expansive, professional-looking man revived.

"Who?" he asked gruffly.

"Mr. Hiram Jenks," Dr. Cree replied.

"Jenks! What do you mean? Where is he?"

"Mr. Jenks is a patient in my sanatorium—no, no, not seriously ill—much better—nearly well—and he wishes to see you."

"He is ill?"

"Nothing serious. The danger is past. He's as well," Dr. Cree continued impressively, "as you are, and he is impatient to see you. If you can call in an hour or so—say at five o'clock? This is my card, with the address. He has had a wonderful recovery!"

"But why couldn't he let me know?" J. B. cried angrily. "What does he mean by it? Of course I'll go to him! Very ill?"

"No, no, it's all right now," said Dr. Cree suavely, "as you will see for yourself; but you must be prepared for some change in him. Illness often makes a change, doesn't it?"

"In a sanatorium—old Hiram?"

"Changed, of course," the doctor went on in his sympathetic voice, as he picked

up his hat and gloves. "In fact, you will hardly know your old friend."

V

DR. IRA CREE was one of those rare men who study themselves. He took an unflinching interest in the fascinating play of his personality, in his ambitions, in his mental processes, in the swiftness and sureness of his intellect. He knew himself and believed in himself.

He was a man of learning. Twenty years of his life he had given to scientific studies, driven on by a devouring ambition—a high and noble ambition to serve not only himself, but also the men and women of his day. Always he had had to struggle against that mean kind of poverty which not only thwarts a high-minded man, but makes him ridiculous.

He had not got the best of his education in academies and colleges; he had dug it out of night schools and public libraries. He had gone hungry to buy books. He had worked at vagabond trades—as waiter, as book peddler, as insurance agent, while getting his education; and at forty he was a learned physician and scientist.

Neither school nor college had given him a diploma, though many an ignoramus could flaunt a sheepskin in his face. Even the "Dr." with which Ira Cree prefaced his name was a courtesy title, which, rightly enough, he had awarded himself. Indeed, he had no love for the old ordered routine of study. Cut and dried lessons, schoolboy examinations, bad marks, or pats on the head from dusty professors, exasperated him.

He was, as Mr. Macraw had suspected, a man of genius. Under the professional black coat was the questing soul of a man, of a great inventor. From long self-inspection he knew just where his strength lay. He defined it to himself as a kind of inspirational hard work. Given an impulse—the push of his native genius—and he could grind away at the toughest job.

He knew there was a fascination about him. It was not only physical, though few people could resist his radiant personal magnetism. Behind it was fascination of a nobler and higher sort, which he scientifically classed as "psychomoral." It radiated from the man within.

Had you asked Dr. Cree who his grandfathers were, he could not have told you; and yet the one scientific theory to which

he clung most stoutly was heredity—his own heredity, his hereditary rhythm.

"I am complex," he used to explain to Ada Calamy, for with her he was always frank. "I am made up of many men—my ancestors. They express themselves through me. Sometimes one and sometimes another is in control. They are all seeking to live again and to express themselves—in me; and that, my dear," he would say, "is heredity."

He was not a simple man. He was the product, the result, of a long procession of unknown ancestors. They were like ghosts within him, each one seeking to impose his own idea of men and things.

These ancestral moods, varying, often contradictory, gave him a power of attraction which pulled to him men of all kinds. His fascination, which he knew to be very real, lay in his anonymous but complex heredity. Almost every one was more or less attracted by some one or another of those shadowy ancestors who dwelt within him, and who made up his powerful and many-sided personality.

Handsome in a corpulent way, fluent of speech, given to gesticulation, he was intensely alive. He radiated physical well-being, physical happiness, as well as the "psychomoral" charm of which he often spoke. Merely to be in his presence was a benefit; and Ada Calamy, as she sat beside him on the big leather couch in his reception room, seemed to draw strength from him, although there was a troubled look on her grave, sweet face.

"Is everything all right?" she asked.

"It always is," he said in his expansive way.

He glanced round the well appointed room, with its shining furniture and brilliant rugs, with its air of being lavish and new. Even the bookcases were lavishly furnished with new books, medical, scientific, technical.

Rooms get to look like the people who live in them, and Dr. Cree's reception room, in spite of its newness, already had something of his impressiveness, his brilliancy, his many-sidedness. There were flowers there, as well as the tools of his trade. Modern art displayed its chromatic vagaries on the walls. All the heterogeneous things in the room seemed to be quite in keeping with Dr. Cree himself.

"You've seen to everything above stairs, Ada?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Mr. Macraw will be here at five o'clock. He's a keen old man, Ada. I rather like him—or rather," he went on smilingly, "I like brains, and he has them—plenty of them. They stick out all over him. In addition to brains, he has a hobby—as I have."

Dr. Cree jumped up in his buoyant way and went over to the center table, on which stood a round glass tray littered with a lot of little jade knickknacks. He picked them up one by one.

"I wish I could have afforded to go in for scarabs as he has. I give you my word, Ada, that old man's collection is worth half a million. It dazzled me. He's a wise old man. Money isn't worth anything except to get you what you want—power and leisure for the work you want to do, or scarabs to gloat over. This little fellow"—he held up a piece of jade between his thumb and forefinger—"is a temple seal, two thousand years old at least. Look at the color of it! It's a greasy gray. That came from the dirty fingers of generations of Chinese monks. They've saturated it with their dirty grease."

"Aren't you going upstairs, Ira?"

"Why? When you've seen to everything? You've as good a head as I have, my dear, and that's saying a lot. However, I might as well have a look around, just to satisfy your careful soul. Why didn't you put on your new cap and apron? But there, you don't like new things."

Miss Calamy wore a nurse's uniform, soft gray in color—like her eyes. She was nice-looking, rather tall, perhaps thirty years of age, or a trifle more. There was something pathetic in her face—in the sensitive mouth and the grave eyes; something at once pathetic and eager. This was especially noticeable when she looked at Dr. Cree, or spoke to him. It was as if his gleaming personality drew her to him, and at the same time held her aloof.

Her devotion to him was evident. She seemed to be absorbed in him, as a mother is in a child.

"And the cigars—did they come, Ada?"

"They are in the cabinet there."

"Good! I'll go up. I might as well see for myself. There's half an hour yet before Mr. Macraw comes. When he does, of course you'll come up with us. And you'll be careful with that new apparatus; but then you always are careful, my dear."

She watched him as he left the room, with a look in which there was both pride and fear. Then, her hands folded in her lap, she sat there, a brooding figure of a woman.

Not many minutes had passed when a bell rang softly in the hall. Perhaps Miss Calamy did not hear it, for she neither raised her eyes nor moved. She was still sitting there, deep in some mood of unhappiness, when a stocky, thick-faced boy in a white jacket opened the door and admitted Mr. Macraw.

She started up at the sound of the visitor's voice speaking Dr. Cree's name.

"He will come in a moment," she said.

"He is upstairs with a patient."

"With Mr. Jenks?" J. B. asked sharply.

"I think so."

"How is he? How is Mr. Jenks?"

"I think he is better, but Dr. Cree will tell you."

"You're the nurse, aren't you? You ought to know!"

"He is better."

"He expects me? Take me to his room, if you please."

Miss Calamy had quite recovered her quiet, pleasant manner.

"Of course you are Mr. Macraw. Please sit down. You are early, you know. I'll have the doctor notified. In fact, I am sure the boy told him you are here."

J. B. sat down in a chair near a table. Instinctively he took up one of the pieces of jade and weighed it in his hand, but his eyes were on the nurse.

"You say he is better? He has been very ill? How long has he been here?"

"Won't you wait for the doctor, Mr. Macraw?"

"How long have you been his nurse?"

"From the beginning," said Dr. Cree, who had come in quietly. He was suave, professional. "Miss Calamy has been with Mr. Jenks from the beginning of his treatment. Don't get up, Mr. Macraw. Our patient is sleeping, and sleep is precious. It won't do to wake him. Yes, Miss Calamy, it is a refreshing sleep, but you had better be near him. In case he wakes, you will let us know at once."

Very professional, kindly, unhurried, Dr. Cree gave his instructions and then took a chair.

"And now, Mr. Macraw—"

"Yes, now, if you please, doctor. What is the matter with Mr. Jenks?"

"Let us rather say what *was* the matter with him, Mr. Macraw; for now we may safely use the past tense."

"Well, what was?" said J. B. bluntly, for his patience was wearing thin, and the doctor's professional manner was a trifle too doctory for him.

"What was the matter, Mr. Macraw? Old age."

"H-m! He didn't seem to think so."

"No? Oh, I take your meaning! He didn't feel old. You are quite right. Mr. Jenks, I should fancy, was never old inside. There he was his real age. All men, Mr. Macraw—all men and all women—have a real and definite age which never leaves them from the cradle to the grave. Some men are always twenty years old. You've known them, and perhaps you've done business with them. You've met young fellows of sixty. There are boys of sixty. Now Mr. Jenks—"

"This is all very interesting, I dare say," J. B. interposed; "but, doctor, I came here to see Mr. Jenks."

"Of course, but you understand we cannot disturb him just yet. As I told you, he is sleeping. By the way, Mr. Macraw, I did not expect you until five o'clock."

"I can wait," J. B. said calmly. "I've been waiting for two weeks to see him."

"He, too, is impatient. Ah, this Mr. Jenks! A wonderful man! He was never a child. He was thirty years old when he was in the cradle, and he has gone on being thirty years of age—inside, that is. Now you see what I meant when I said the trouble with him was old age. So it was. Inside, he was thirty years of age, as he had always been. Outside, he was seventy-one. What was the result, Mr. Macraw? Discord, sir! I need not tell you that ill health is nothing but disharmony between the body and the machine inside—call it soul or what you will—that drives the body along."

"H-m!" said J. B.

"A cigar, Mr. Macraw?" Dr. Cree took from the cabinet a box of cigars, opened the box, and held it out to the old banker. "Not too strong, I trust?"

"They're all right," returned J. B., looking the doctor in the face. "That's the cigar Jenks smokes. I know it."

"You are quite right. I got them for him."

Unconsciously J. B. had been dandling in his hand the bit of jade he had taken up

from the table. Before selecting a cigar, he laid it back on the tray. Dr. Cree pounced on it.

"Ah, my scaraboid seal!" he exclaimed. "About the third century, I think. You noticed the lion's head? Strength! And the rising sun? Eternal youth—youth that renews itself! They knew, those old Egyptians. Modern science is just beginning to overtake them. Our new men, like Fiske of New York and Voronoff of Paris, are leading the way, and I, Mr. Macraw, have gone as far as they have, or further—much further, perhaps. They theorize and I act. You think that youth is merely a question of years. That it is a point in time. Nonsense! Youth is the will to live, and your youth will continue just as long as your will to keep young is functioning. You see?"

J. B. was at ease. He was drawing comfort from his cigar. He told himself that the doctor was a talker; but he answered politely enough.

"That seems true, Dr. Cree; but the body wears out, and then where is your youth?"

"When does it wear out?" the doctor asked vehemently. "At fifty, at sixty, at seventy? Do you know how long the human machine was meant to run before it went to smash, all of a sudden, like the one-hoss shay? I'll tell you. In all animals, Mr. Macraw, the duration of life is about seven times the period of growth. Take a horse. He is adult at four years of age; he should live, then, for nearly thirty years, bar accidents. Now man is adult—that is, his bony structure stops growing—at about twenty. Well, figure it out yourself. Man should live seven times that long. In other words, his normal life should be about one hundred and forty years. Why isn't it? Accidental causes, disease, nervous exhaustion. The vital forces are not exhausted. Indeed, the rarest thing a doctor ever comes upon is a death from the natural cause—old age. Voronoff said he had never found one case where a man, even in what is called extreme old age, died a natural physiological death—died, that is, without some accidental cause of disease."

"Interesting," said J. B., over his cigar.

"Interesting? That is a mild word. Do you see the point? You, sir, should live to be one hundred and forty years of age, according to nature; and therefore your

period of youth should be proportionate. You admit it?"

"It seems reasonable."

"It is reasonable," repeated Dr. Cree more quietly, though it was evident that the subject stirred him deeply. "Of course it is reasonable. Every animal lives naturally seven times the period of its immaturity, and its normal youthfulness, before senile debility sets in, is about six times that period. A deer is mature at six; at thirty-six his reign of youth is over; and he settles into the decadence of old age and dies at forty-two a perfectly natural death. Is man an exception to all the laws of nature? No, he is also an animal, no matter what else he may be, and he is subject to the same natural laws. When he is one hundred and twenty years old, it is time enough for him to declare himself out of the running, and to begin to admit he is an old man."

The banker laughed in his gruff way.

"I'm an old man, doctor," he said; "and, like all old ones, I should wish to be young; but you haven't answered my question. I'll accept all your scientific theories about the normal man. He should carry on healthily, as the horse does, for six times the period of his immaturity—was that your phrase?—and then die decently when he is seven times twenty years old. Unfortunately, he doesn't. The bodily machine wears out. Perhaps we wear it out foolishly—by foolish ways of living, I mean. We work too hard, and get tired, and are willing to be old."

"Losing the will—to live—letting go the vital forces—"

"Well, what you men of science haven't found out is how to keep the vital forces, as you call them, going, and how to prevent the physical machine from breaking up, eh?"

Dr. Cree had listened respectfully, but more and more his face had brightened with impatience—a triumphant sort of impatience, which would hardly permit him to hear the speaker out.

"But we men of science have found it!" he declared.

It was a dominating, excited man who spoke. He radiated conviction, force, sincerity. J. B.—who, as he knew, was not susceptible to the kind of impelling, personal magnetism that radiated from the dark and glittering scientist—felt that he was in the presence of a man who was

speaking from the very depths of conviction. He listened with new and intense interest.

"Found what?"

"How to keep the bodily machine from breaking up—how to make it carry on, like the body of a horse or a deer or a dog, to its appointed time. That is what the men of science have found! And I am one of them," he added softly, as if to himself; but J. B. heard him, and discerned no arrogance in the claim.

"You may not know what Voronoff has done. He began with old animals—senile, worn with the years—and grafted on them the interstitial glands of young animals. What happened? The old dog became young; the old, lean, wretched goat, tottering on decrepit legs, found again its agile, leaping youth. It lasted, too. They stayed young, sir—stayed young!"

"A dog is not a man," the old banker said.

"No? Well, Voronoff did for men what he did for dogs. A fact! Science! That was Voronoff's way. There was Bailey, of Chicago, who fed radium into old men, in milk or sugar, and brought them back to the normal point, where nature meant them to be at seventy or eighty. That was Bailey's way. And mine?"

A veil suddenly seemed to fall over the mobile, brilliant face. He looked at old J. B. almost suspiciously; then he laughed apologetically.

"Pardon me," he said. "The subject carried me away."

"But you have a method of your own, doctor," J. B. persisted.

Dr. Cree showed reluctance.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, but added nothing to the monosyllable.

For a little while the men faced each other in silence. At last the doctor rose from his chair.

"I think we might go up," he said.

"Thank you."

Old J. B. laid down the butt of his cigar and stood up. As he went toward the door, he remarked:

"I shall be glad to see Hiram Jenks!"

Dr. Cree smiled gently.

"But will you know him?"

VI

OLD J. B. had always believed in luck. It is a Wall Street habit; and from believing in luck it is only a step to believing in

those queer premonitions that haunt even the most humdrum mind. J. B. remembered that Napoleon also put faith in them, and thought none the worse of himself.

Now, as Dr. Cree preceded him up the broad staircase to the upper floor of the sanatorium, he felt that something was going to happen. What? He did not know; but all the time one of his strong premonitions was whispering to him.

"This is an old house," Dr. Cree was saying. "Up to the present I've only fitted up the first two floors for my work. My domestics have the basement, and the top floor is empty."

At the head of the stairs was a square hall. No windows were visible, and the light came from a shaded globe in the ceiling. Dr. Cree opened a door to the right, and held back a heavy curtain.

"Will you come in, please?"

He spoke in a calm voice. He was dignified, with a new kind of reserve, as if at last he was master of himself, confident, steady, superb. The vehemence and the glitter of his strange personality were covered with this new mood of authority.

"Come in!" he repeated.

The room was lighted by red lamps sunk deep in the upper part of the walls. It was a soft light, deep in hue, and the room glowed with it like the heart of a ruby. The effect was curious, inspiriting. Old J. B. felt as if he were breathing red, as if he were submerged in a sea of redness. Red waves seemed to roll out of the heavy curtains that masked the windows and door. They were reflected from the crimson-stained walls, in the silk of the tall, fantastic furniture, from the rugs that lay like pools of living blood on the brick-colored floor, from the scarlet Chinese screen that hid the fireplace.

The room was filled with silence. It was so quiet that J. B. could hear the quickened beat of his heart—or was it the pulsing blood in his ears?

A sense of livingness—of life, active and almost angry—woke in him. He straightened up his lank old body. The coldness went out of his jasper-colored eyes, and they caught the glow of the hidden lamps. He felt the effect of this colorful room, but he was only half aware of the change that had come over him—the freshness and invigoration that coursed through him.

"Where is Hiram Jenks?" he demanded abruptly.

"Will you wait here a moment?" Dr. Cree replied in his new voice of cold responsibility. "I will go and see."

When he was left alone, J. B. glanced round the room with disfavor.

"What's the fellow keeping me here for?" he muttered to himself. "Hanky-panky!"

He looked at his watch. It lacked five minutes of the appointed hour when he was to see—after these weeks of mysterious absence—his old friend and partner. His temper grew hot with impatience. He glared at the curtain behind which Dr. Cree had disappeared.

"Damn the fellow!" he said aloud. "What does he mean?"

The doctor may have heard him. He raised the portière and beckoned.

"Come, please," he said calmly.

In spite of himself the old banker was impressed. Dr. Cree, with his new dignity and masterfulness, was indeed impressive. The red room had "got on his nerves," he told himself.

"Is he in there?"

The doctor did not answer. He merely waited for J. B. to enter the adjoining room.

It was as if the old man had stepped out of a red furnace into a summer sky. When the curtain fell behind him, he was in a world of violet-blue, serene and made of peace. Hidden lamps rained down light of violet-blue. There was no other color. The walls, the hangings, the low, creeping furniture, puffy and luxurious with cushions, the floor, the ceiling, were all of the same unvarying hue of violet-blue. It was not depressing, but it was very quiet—radiating calm.

Dr. Cree, always in his level, unemotional voice, was speaking.

"You understand, of course, Mr. Mac-craw," he said, "the therapeutic value of the colored rays of light. They play upon the living tissue of man as a great artist plays upon his instrument. With them we can make and unmake the very destiny of man. The color rays in the room you have just left pour into him the subtle heat which is life—vitality. They summon his courage. They give him strength to take his vengeance. The rays of power! But you understand all this," he went on more familiarly. "You have learned it from the red-blooded scarabs. On the other hand, this blue room cradles a man into peace. It stills him until he becomes so quiet that

he can hear the voice of his soul, whispering to him. You know. You have read it all in your sapphires."

"I don't know what you are talking about," J. B. replied, but his temper was waning. "This new science is a bit too thick for me. It is interesting, of course. I can see that all these color baths might be useful, if you have crazy patients."

"There are no lunatics here. I am an expert," the doctor said proudly. "An expert in sane living," he added, after a pause.

He stared at J. B. with his heavy-lidded black eyes until the old man felt uncomfortable. A little of his former dislike for this baffling scientist came back to him; and yet, confound it, the fellow impressed him!

"You are ready to see my patient, Mr. Macraw?"

"I have been ready for half an hour."

"Very well. You will remember what I said—and be prepared. He is not the man he was."

"For Heaven's sake let me see for myself! Take me to him at once—if you please," he added, as an afterthought.

They went out into the square hall, where the light was dim and shadows hung about the corners. J. B., whose old eyes were affected by the colored lights of the rooms he had passed through, was not quite sure that he could depend upon them; but he made out, at the back of the hall, a narrow, walled-off staircase that went up to the floor above. It was dark there, and in the obscurity something moved—a squat thing neither gray nor white.

The banker's nerves gave a jump. The unknown always exasperated him.

"What's that?" he said angrily.

Dr. Cree seemed equally annoyed.

"Claude, what are you doing there?" he asked.

It was the boy who had admitted J. B. to the sanatorium. He shuffled forward, white-jacketed. An apron falling to his feet gave him the appearance of a truncated cone. With his long arms he held out in front of him something covered with a white cloth. He halted just under the ceiling light and raised a fooling, frightened face.

"What's the matter with that boy?" J. B. asked sharply.

"What do you mean?"

"His face!" the old man exclaimed.

It was thick-lipped, blunt-nosed, heavy-jawed. The timid eyes were like those of a domestic animal; the hair on the scalp was dense and black, like an astrakhan cap. With that went a skin wholly without color. It was not flesh-colored; it was not white—which would have been a ghastly thing; but it had the grayish pallor seen in the faces of the dead, or in those of men long buried in a prison cell.

J. B. had not noticed Claude when he was shown into the house. It was not his way to look at servants; but now he stared at the boy with horror, as if he was something that had been dug up. He drew his hands across his eyes.

"What is it?" he repeated impatiently.

Suddenly he went forward, turned up the boy's chin, and looked into his eyes. After a moment's scrutiny he laid a finger on the tip of the nose. Then he moved away, still looking with a kind of terror at the frightened lad.

"My God!" he said slowly. "What have you done to him?"

"Go down stairs, Claude," Dr. Cree told the boy, giving him a kindly touch on the shoulder. "Never mind what you were about. Wait in my office."

Without a word Claude shuffled away in his long apron, holding at arm's length the round, white burden. The frightened look had never faded from his face.

"It's a devilish thing to do, however you did it!" J. B. declared.

"I had something to tell you about that boy, Mr. Macraw, but I see you understand. When you looked into the whites of his eyes, I saw that you were on the right track. The moment you touched the tip of his nose, I was convinced that you knew. Not many people do."

"He's a negro!"

"He was," Dr. Cree answered calmly, "until I bleached him. Now I don't know what he is. He is white, isn't he? But the eyes, the hair, the walk, the finger nails, remain as they were. Africa is in them. And the nose! That is very curious. In the white race, at the end of the nose, just under the skin, as you evidently know, one can feel the cleft in the cartilage. It is the mark of the white man—the only unfailing mark. Neither black nor brown has it—only the Aryan race; and when there is an admixture of dark blood, the Aryan loses this caste mark. In this mixed world, Mr. Macraw, you are a bold man if you go

about feeling the noses of your acquaintances," the doctor concluded, smiling.

"Do you mean to say you made that boy white—or whatever he is?"

"He certainly is not black, as he was six months ago. One of my dermatological experiments, Mr. Macraw—an interesting case. It will be famous in the literature of the skin. The case of Claude Allingham—that's his name. Somehow or other these darkies seem to get all the fine names. He's a faithful servant, is Claude. Obedience? He obeys a whisper—a look. You see he is afraid that I may decide to turn him black again!"

Dr. Cree laughed in anything but a professional manner.

"It is a devilish thing! It's against nature!" J. B. said emphatically. "What will come of it? It's anarchy. It's all part of the damnable leveling down of these days."

"Leveling up, Mr. Macraw—not down. I've lifted poor Claude Allingham into the white race. When I've got the kink out of his hair—another experiment that I shall shortly undertake—"

"Experiment? H-m!"

All J. B.'s distrust had returned, and with it a sense of repulsion. This doctor, for all his dignity and pompous suavity—perhaps by reason of them—nauseated the grim old man. There was something still worse. J. B. was not quite sure that he was master of himself. His nerves, he knew, were in a swither; and what angered

him most of all was his conviction that the doctor knew it.

"Hankypanky!" he kept on muttering to himself.

What hankypanky had this mountebank been up to with Hiram in this damnable house of white negroes and crazy lights?

"Hush! Quietly, please," said Dr. Cree.

He went on tiptoe to a door at the right. He did not knock. He drew his fingers down the panel, making a slight, almost purring noise. Twice he did this, and waited. J. B. was at his elbow, eagerly craning forward.

"Please do not speak," the doctor whispered. J. B. could feel the fellow's warm breath in his ear. "Remember, please!"

Then, silently, the door opened. A wave of superheated air, heavy with jasmine odor, struck J. B. in the face, taking away his breath. There was a buzzing murmur, as of innumerable bees. The light in the room leaped and changed. For a moment it was green; then it was shot through with flickers of pallid lightning.

The old banker's eyes were dazzled. At last he made out the tall form of the nurse. She was standing near a narrow, upright cabinet, which towered nearly to the ceiling. From one side of this monolith structure protruded levers and handles. From the top of it emerged a tangle of silk-wound wires.

That was all J. B. saw, unless it was something flat and white in the corner, as he followed Dr. Cree into the room.

(To be continued in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE LIBELOUS YEARS

Snow on the head, midsummer at the heart,

Oh, wintry body with the soul of spring!

The years say it is time for you to part

From love and every foolish, happy thing.

The hour grows late, night falls; too late to sing—

Too late—thy fellows are abed; and art

And all life's toys must go. The curfew ring

Summons the soul—'tis time for you to start.

But what if time and I should disagree,

And I should answer that the years are wrong?

What if I will not put away my toys—

I still as green and merry as a tree,

And in my heart unsung still many a song,

And at my lips untasted many joys?

Oliver C. Moore

The Horror Horn

A STRANGE STORY OF THE ALPS IN WINTER

By E. F. Benson

FOR the past ten days the Alpine village of Alhübel had basked in the radiant midwinter weather proper to its altitude of more than six thousand feet. From sunrise to sunset that luminary—so surprising to those who have hitherto associated the winter sun with a pale tepid plate indistinctly shining through the murky air of England—had blazed its way across the sparkling blue. Every night the serene and windless frost had made the stars sparkle like illuminated diamond dust.

Sufficient snow had fallen before Christmas to content the skiers, and the big rink, sprinkled every evening, had given the skaters, each morning, a fresh surface on which to perform their slippery antics. Bridge and dancing served to while away the greater part of the night.

To me, for the first time tasting the joys of a winter in the Engadine, it seemed that a new heaven and a new earth had been lighted, warmed, and refrigerated for the special benefit of those who, like myself, had been wise enough to save up their days of holiday for the winter.

But a break came in these ideal conditions. One afternoon the sun became veiled with vapor, and up the valley, from the northwest, came a wind frozen with miles of travel over ice-bound hillsides. Soon the air was dusted with snow, first in small flakes driven almost horizontally before its congealing breath, and then in larger tufts, as of swan's-down.

All day, for a fortnight before, the fate of nations and life and death had seemed of far less importance than to get certain tracings of the skate-blade on the ice of proper shape and size; but now it seemed that the one paramount consideration was to hurry back to the hotel for shelter. It was wiser to leave rocking turns alone than to be frozen in their quest.

I had come out here with my cousin, Professor Ingram, the celebrated physiologist and Alpine climber. During the serenity of the last fortnight he had made a couple of notable winter ascents; but this morning his weather wisdom had mistrusted the signs of the heavens, and instead of attempting the ascent of the Piz Passug, he had waited to see whether his misgivings justified themselves. So there he sat now in the hall of the admirable hotel, with his feet on the hot water pipes, and the latest delivery of the English post in his hands. This contained a pamphlet concerning the result of the Mount Everest expedition, of which he had just finished the perusal when I entered.

"A very interesting report," he said, passing it to me. "They certainly deserve to succeed next year; but who can tell what that final six thousand feet may entail? Six thousand feet more, when you have already accomplished twenty-three thousand, does not seem much; but at present no one knows whether the human frame can stand exertion at such a height. It may affect not the lungs and heart only, but possibly the brain. Delirious hallucinations may occur. In fact, if I did not know better, I should have said that one such hallucination had occurred to the climbers already."

"And what was that?" I asked.

"You will find that they thought they came across the tracks of some naked human foot at a great altitude. That looks, at first sight, like a hallucination. What more natural than that a brain excited and exhilarated by the extreme height should have interpreted certain marks in the snow as the footprints of a human being? Every bodily organ, at such heights, is exerting itself to the utmost to do its work, and the brain seizes on those marks in the snow

and says, 'Yes, I'm all right, I'm doing my job, and I perceive marks in the snow which I affirm are human footprints.' Here, at this comparatively moderate altitude, you know how restless and eager the brain is, how vividly, as you told me, you dream at night. Multiply that stimulus and that consequent eagerness and restlessness by three, and how natural that the brain should harbor illusions! What, after all, is the delirium which often accompanies high fever, but the effort of the brain to do its work under the pressure of feverish conditions? It is so eager to continue perceiving that it perceives things which have no existence."

"And yet you don't think that these naked human footprints were illusions," said I. "You told me you would have thought so, if you had not known better."

He shifted in his chair and looked out of the window for a moment. The air was thick now with the density of the big snowflakes driven along by the squealing north-west gale.

"Quite so," he said. "In all probability the human footprints were real human footprints. At any rate, I expect, they were the footprints of a being more nearly a man than anything else. My reason for saying so is that I learn such beings exist. I have even seen quite near at hand—I assure you I did not wish to be nearer, in spite of my intense curiosity—the creature, shall we say, which would make such footprints. If the snow was not so dense, I could show you the place where I saw him."

He pointed straight out of the window, where across the valley lies the huge tower of the Ungeheuerhorn, with the carved pinnacle of rock at the top like the horn of some gigantic rhinoceros. On one side only, as I knew, was the mountain practicable, and that for none but the finest climbers. On the other three a succession of ledges and precipices rendered it unscalable. Two thousand feet of sheer rock form the tower; below are five hundred feet of fallen boulders, up to the edge of which grow dense woods of larch and pine.

"Upon the Ungeheuerhorn?" I asked.

"Yes. Until twenty years ago it had never been ascended, and I, like several others, spent a lot of time in trying to find a route up it. My guide and I sometimes passed three nights together at the hut beside the Blumen glacier, prowling around it. It was by luck that we found the route,

for the mountain looks even more impracticable from the far side than it does from this. But one day we found a long transverse fissure, which led to a negotiable ledge. Then there came a slanting ice couloir, which you could not see till you got to the foot of it. However, I need not go into that."

II

THE big room where we sat was filling up with cheerful groups driven indoors by the sudden gale and snowfall, and the cackle of merry tongues grew loud. The band, too, that invariable appanage of teatime at Swiss resorts, had begun to tune up for the usual potpourri from the works of Puccini. Next moment the sugary, sentimental melodies began.

"Strange contrast!" said Ingram. "Here are we sitting warm and cozy, our ears pleasantly tickled with these baby tunes. Outside the storm is growing more violent every moment, and swirling round the austere cliffs of the Ungeheuerhorn—the Horror Horn, as indeed it was to me."

"I want to hear all about it," I said. "I want every detail. Make a short story long, if it's short. I want to know why it's *your* Horror Horn?"

"Well, Chanton and I—he was my guide—used to spend days prowling about the cliffs, making a little progress on one side, and then being stopped, or gaining perhaps five hundred feet on another side, and then being confronted by some insuperable obstacle, till the day when, by luck, we found the route. Chanton never liked the job, for some reason that I could not fathom. It was not because of the difficulty or danger of the climbing, for he was the most fearless man I have ever met when dealing with rocks and ice; but he was always insistent that we should get off the mountain and back to the Blumen hut before sunset. He was scarcely easy even when we had got back to shelter and locked and barred the door.

"I well remember one night when, as we ate our supper, we heard some animal—a wolf, probably—howling somewhere out in the night. A positive panic seized him, and I don't think he closed his eyes till morning. It struck me then that there might be some grisly legend about the mountain, connected possibly with its name; so next day I asked him why the peak was called the Horror Horn. He put

the question off at first, and said that, like the Schreckhorn, its name was due to its precipices and falling stones. When I pressed him further, he acknowledged that there was a legend about it, which his father had told him.

"There were creatures, so it was supposed, who lived in its caves—things human in shape, and covered, except for the face and hands, with long black hair. They were dwarfs in size, four feet high or thereabouts, but of prodigious strength and agility, the remnants of some wild, primeval race. It seemed that they were still in an upward stage of evolution, or so I guessed, for the story ran that sometimes girls had been carried off by them, not as prey, and not for any such fate as for those captured by cannibals, but to be bred from. Young men, too, had been raped by them, to be mated with the females of their tribe. All this looked as if the creatures, as I said, were tending toward humanity.

"Naturally, I did not believe a word of it, as applied to the conditions of the present day. Centuries ago, conceivably, there may have been such beings. With the extraordinary tenacity of tradition, the story had been handed down, from one generation to another, and was still current around the hearths of the peasants. As for their numbers, Chanton told me that three had been once seen together by a man who, owing to his swiftness on skis, had escaped to tell the tale. This man, he averred, was no other than his grandfather, who had been benighted one winter evening as he passed through the dense woods below the Ungeheuerhorn. Chanton supposed that they had been driven down to these lower altitudes in search of food during severe winter weather, for otherwise the recorded sights of them had always taken place among the rocks of the peak itself. They had pursued his grandfather, then a young man, at an extraordinary swift canter, running sometimes upright, as men run, sometimes on all fours, in the manner of beasts; and their howls were just such as that we had heard that night in the Blumen hut. Such, at any rate, was the story Chanton told me. Like you, I regarded it as the very moonshine of superstition; but the next day I had reason to reconsider my judgment about it.

"It was on that day that after a week of exploration we hit on the only route at present known to the top of our peak. We

started as soon as there was light enough to climb by, for, as you may guess, on very difficult rocks it is impossible to climb by lantern or moonlight. We hit on the long fissure I have spoken of, we explored the ledge which from below seemed to end in nothingness, and with an hour's step-cutting we ascended the couloir that led upward from it. From there onward it was a rock climb, certainly of considerable difficulty, but with no heartbreaking discoveries ahead, and about nine o'clock in the morning we stood on the top. We did not wait there long, for when the sun grows hot that side of the mountain is raked by falling stones loosened from the ice that holds them, and we made haste to pass the ledge where the falls are most frequent. After that there was the long fissure to descend, a matter of no great difficulty, and we were at the end of our work by midday—both of us, as you may imagine, in a state of the highest elation.

"A long and tiresome scramble among the huge boulders at the foot of the cliff then lay before us. Here the rock formation is very porous, and great caves extend far into the mountain. We had unroped at the base of the fissure, and were picking our way as seemed good to either of us among these fallen rocks, many of them bigger than an ordinary house, when, on turning the corner of one of these, I saw a sight which made it clear that the stories Chanton had told me were no figment of traditional superstition.

"Not twenty yards in front of me lay one of the beings of which he had spoken. There it sprawled, naked, basking on its back, with its face turned up to the sun, which its narrow eyes regarded without winking. In form it was human, but the growth of hair that covered limbs and trunk alike almost completely hid the sun-tanned skin beneath. Its face, however, save for the down on its cheeks and chin, was hairless; and I looked on a countenance the sensual and maleficent bestiality of which froze me with horror. Had the creature been an animal, one would have felt scarcely a shudder at the gross animalism of it. The horror lay in the fact that it was a man. There lay by it a couple of gnawed bones, and, its meal finished, it was lazily licking its protuberant lips, from which came a purring murmur of content. With one hand it scratched the thick hair on its belly, in the other it held one of the bones, which

presently split in half beneath the pressure of its finger and thumb.

"My horror was not based on the stories of what happened to those men whom these creatures caught. It was due simply to my proximity to a thing so human and so infernal. The peak of whose ascent had a moment ago filled us with such elation became to me an Ungeheuerhorn indeed, for it was the home of beings more awful than the delirium of nightmare could ever have conceived.

"Chanton was a dozen paces behind me, and with a backward wave of my hand I caused him to halt. Then, withdrawing myself with infinite precaution, so as not to attract the gaze of that basking creature, I slipped back around the rock and whispered to him what I had seen. With blanched faces we made a long detour, peering around every corner, and crouching low, not knowing that at any step we might not come upon another of these beings, or that from the mouth of one of the caves in the mountainside there might not appear another of those hairless and dreadful faces, perhaps with the breasts and insignia of womanhood. That would have been the worst of all.

"Luck favored us, for we made our way among the boulders and shifting stones, the rattle of which might at any moment have betrayed us, without a repetition of my experience. Once among the trees, we ran as if the Furies themselves were in pursuit. Well now did I understand, though I dare say I cannot convey, the qualms of Chanton's mind when he spoke to me of these creatures. Their very humanity was what made them so terrible—the fact that they were of the same race as ourselves, but of a type so abysmally degraded that the most brutal and inhuman of men would have seemed angelic in comparison."

III

THE music of the small band was over before Ingram finished his narrative, and the chattering groups round the tea-table had dispersed. He paused a moment.

"There was a horror of the spirit," he said, "which I experienced then, and from which, I verily believe, I have never entirely recovered. I saw how terrible a living thing could be, and how terrible, in consequence, was life itself. In us all, I suppose, lurks some inherited germ of that ineffable bestiality, and who knows whether,

sterile as it has apparently become in the course of centuries, it might not fructify again? When I saw that creature sun itself, I looked into the abyss out of which we have crawled. And these creatures are trying to crawl out of it now, if they exist any longer. For the last twenty years there has been no record of their being seen, until we come to this story of the footprint observed by the climbers on Everest. If that is authentic, if the party did not mistake the footprint of some bear, or what not, for a human tread, it seems as if this bestranded remnant of mankind is still in existence."

Ingram had told his story well, but, as we sat in this warm and civilized room, the horror that he evidently felt had not communicated itself to me in any very vivid manner. Intellectually I agreed with him. I could appreciate his horror, but certainly my spirit felt no shudder of interior comprehension.

"But it is odd," I said, "that your keen interest in physiology did not disperse your qualms. You were looking, I take it, at some form of man more remote, probably, than the earliest human remains. Did not something inside you say, 'This is of absorbing significance'?"

He shook his head.

"No—I only wanted to get away," he said. "It was not, as I have told you, the terror of what, according to Chanton's story, might await us if we were captured; it was sheer horror at the creature itself. I quaked at it."

The snowstorm and the gale increased in violence that night, and I slept uneasily, plucked again and again from slumber by the fierce battling of the wind that shook my windows as if with an imperious demand for admittance. It came in billow gusts, with strange noises intermingled with it as for a moment it abated, with flutings and moanings that rose to shrieks as the fury of it returned. These noises, no doubt, were mingling themselves with my drowsed and sleepy consciousness. Once I tore myself out of nightmare, imagining that the creatures of the Horror Horn had gained footing on my balcony, and were rattling at the window bolts.

Before morning the gale had died away, and I awoke to see the snow falling dense and fast in a windless air. For three days it continued without intermission. Then, with its cessation, there came a frost such

as I have never felt before. Fifty degrees were registered one night, and more the next, and what the cold must have been on the cliffs of the Ungeheuerhorn I cannot imagine. It was sufficient, I thought, to have made an end altogether of the mysterious inhabitants of the mountain. My cousin, on that day twenty years ago, had missed an opportunity for study which would probably never fall again either to him or another.

IV

ONE morning I received a letter from a friend, saying that he had arrived at the neighboring winter resort of San Luigi, and proposing that I should come over for a morning's skating and lunch afterward. The place was not more than a couple of miles off, if one took the path over the low, pine-clad foothills above which lay the steep woods below the first rocky slopes of the Ungeheuerhorn.

Accordingly, with a knapsack containing skates on my back, I went on skis over the wooded slopes and down by an easy descent to San Luigi. The day was overcast, and clouds entirely obscured the higher peaks, though the sun was visible, pale and un luminous through the mist.

As the morning went on, the sun gained the upper hand, and I slid down into San Luigi beneath a sparkling firmament. We skated and lunched, and then, since it looked as if thick weather was coming up again, I set out early—about three o'clock—for my return journey.

Hardly had I got into the woods when the clouds gathered above, and streamers and skeins of them began to descend among the pines through which my path threaded its way. In ten minutes more their opacity had so increased that I could hardly see a couple of yards in front of me.

Very soon I became aware that I must have got off the path, for snow-cowled shrubs lay directly in my way, and, casting back to find it again, I became altogether confused as to direction. However, though progress was difficult, I knew I had only to keep on the ascent, and presently I should come to the brow of these low foothills and descend into the open valley where Alhubel stood. So on I went, stumbling and sliding over obstacles, and unable to take off my skis, owing to the thickness of the snow, for I should have sunk over the knees at each step.

Still the ascent continued. Looking at my watch, I saw that I had already been nearly an hour on my way from San Luigi—a period more than sufficient to complete my whole journey; but still I stuck to my idea that though I must have strayed far from my proper route, a few minutes more must surely see me over the top of the upward way, and I should find the ground declining into the next valley.

I noticed that the mists were becoming suffused with rose-color. Though the inference was that it must be close on sunset, there was consolation in the fact that they might lift at any moment and disclose to me my whereabouts. The fact that night would soon be on me made it needful to bar my mind against that despair of loneliness which eats out the heart of a man who is lost in woods or on mountain-side. I knew that one who yields to it may still have plenty of vigor in his limbs, but his nervous force is sapped, and he can do no more than lie down and abandon himself to whatever fate may await him.

And then I heard a sound that made the thought of loneliness seem bliss indeed, for there was a worse fate than loneliness. What I heard resembled the howl of a wolf, and it came from not far in front of me, where the ridge—was it a ridge?—rose higher in its vestment of pines.

From behind me came a sudden puff of wind, which shook the frozen snow from the drooping pine branches, and swept away the mists as a broom sweeps the dust from the floor. Radiant above me were the unclouded skies, already charged with the red of the sunset. In front I saw that I had come to the very edge of the wood through which I had wandered so long; but it was no valley into which I had penetrated, for there, right ahead of me, rose the steep slope of boulders and rocks soaring upward to the foot of the Ungeheuerhorn.

What, then, was the wolflike cry which had made my heart stand still? I saw.

Not twenty yards from me was a fallen tree, and leaning against it was one of the hideous denizens of the Horror Horn. It was a woman. She was enveloped in a thick growth of hair, gray and tufted. From her head it streamed down over her shoulders and over her bosom, from which hung withered and pendulous breasts. Looking on her face, I comprehended, not with my mind alone, but with a shudder of my spirit, what Ingram had felt.

Never had nightmare fashioned so terrible a countenance. The beauty of sun and stars, and of the beasts of the field and the kindly race of men, could not atone for so hellish an incarnation of the spirit of life. A fathomless bestiality modeled the slaving mouth and the narrow eyes. I looked into the abyss itself, and knew that out of that abyss on the edge of which I leaned the generation of men had climbed. What if that ledge crumbled in front of me, and pitched me headlong into its nethermost depths?

In one hand the creature held by the horns a chamois, which kicked and struggled. A blow from its hind leg caught her withered thigh. With a grunt of anger she seized the leg in her other hand, and, as a man may pull from its sheath a stem of meadow grass, she plucked it off the body, leaving the torn skin hanging around the gaping wound.

Putting the red and bleeding member to her mouth, she sucked at it as a child sucks a stick of sweetmeat. Through flesh and gristle her short brown teeth penetrated, and she licked her lips with a sound of purring. Then, dropping the leg by her side, she looked again at the body of the prey, now quivering in its death convulsion, and with finger and thumb she gouged out one of its eyes. She snapped her teeth on it, and it cracked like a soft-shelled nut.

V

It must have been but a few seconds that I stood watching this apparition, in some indescribable catalepsy of terror, while through my brain there pealed the panic command of my mind to my stricken limbs:

"Begone, begone, while there is time!"

Recovering the power of my joints and muscles, I tried to slip behind a tree and hide myself; but the woman—shall I call her so?—must have caught my stir of movement, for she raised her eyes from her living feast and saw me.

She craned forward her neck, dropped her prey, and, half rising, began to move toward me. As she did this, she opened her mouth and gave forth a howl such as I had heard a moment before. It was answered by another wolflike cry, but faintly and distantly.

Sliding and slipping, with the toes of my skis tripping in the obstacles below the snow, I plunged forward down the hill between the pine trunks. The low sun, al-

ready sinking behind some rampart of mountain in the west, reddened the snow and the pines with its last rays. My knapsack, with the skates in it, swung to and fro on my back; one ski stick had already been twitched out of my hand by a fallen branch of pine; but not a second's pause could I allow myself to recover it.

I gave no glance behind, and I knew not at what pace my pursuer was on my track, or indeed whether any pursued at all. My whole mind and energy, now working at full power under the stress of my panic, was devoted to getting down the hill and out of the wood as swiftly as my limbs could bear me.

For a little while I heard nothing but the hissing snow of my headlong passage, and the rustle of the covered undergrowth beneath my feet. Then, from close at hand behind me, the wolf howl sounded once more, and I heard the plunging of footsteps other than my own.

The strap of my knapsack had shifted, and, as my skates swung to and fro on my back, it chafed and pressed on my throat, hindering free passage of air—of which, God knew, my laboring lungs were in dire need. Without pausing, I slipped it free from my neck, and held it in the hand from which my ski stick had been jerked. I seemed to go a little more easily for this adjustment.

Now, not so far distant, I could see below me the path from which I had strayed. If only I could reach that, the smoother going would surely enable me to outdistance my pursuer, who on the rougher ground was slowly overhauling me. At the sight of that ribbon stretching unimpeded down the hill, a ray of hope pierced the black panic of my soul.

With that came the desire, keen and insistent, to see who or what it was that was on my tracks, and I spared a backward glance. It was she, the hag whom I had seen at her gruesome meal. Her long gray hair flew out behind her, her mouth chattered and gibbered, her fingers made grabbing movements, as if already they closed on me.

The path was now at hand, and the nearness of it, I suppose, made me incautious. A hump of snow-covered bush lay in front of me. Thinking that I could jump over it, I tripped and fell, smothering myself in snow.

I heard a maniac noise, half scream, half

laugh, from close behind. Before I could recover myself, the grabbing fingers were at my neck, as if a vise had closed there.

My right hand, in which I held my knapsack of skates, was free. With a blind backhanded movement, I whirled it behind me at the full length of its strap. I knew that my desperate blow had found its billet somewhere. Even before I could look around, I felt the grip on my neck relax, and something fell with a thud into the very bush which had entangled me.

I recovered my feet, and turned. There she lay, twitching and quivering. The heels of my skates, piercing the thin alpaca of the knapsack, had hit her full on the temple, from which the blood was pouring.

A hundred yards away I could see another hideous creature coming downward on my tracks, leaping and bounding. At that panic rose again within me, and I sped off down the white, smooth path that led to the lights of the village, already beckoning. Never once did I pause in my headlong going. There was no safety until I was back among the haunts of men.

I flung myself against the door of the hotel and screamed for admittance, though I had but to turn the handle and enter. Once more, as when Ingram told his tale, there was the sound of the band in the spacious hall, and the chatter of voices; and there, too, was he himself. He looked

up and then rose swiftly to his feet as I made my clattering entrance.

"I have seen them, too!" I cried. "Look at my knapsack! Is there not blood on it? It is the blood of one of them—a woman, a hag, who tore off the leg of a chamois as I looked, and pursued me through the accursed wood. I—"

Whether it was I who spun round, or the room that seemed to spin round me, I knew not, but I heard myself falling on the floor. The next time that I was conscious, I was in bed. Beside the bed were Ingram, who told me that I was quite safe, and another man, a stranger, who pricked my arm with the nozzle of a syringe.

A day or two later I gave a coherent account of my adventure, and three or four men, armed with guns, went over my traces. They found the bush over which I had stumbled, with a pool of blood which had soaked into the snow. Still following my ski tracks, they came on the body of a chamois. One of its hind legs had been torn off, and one eye-socket was empty.

That is all the corroboration of my story that I can give the reader. I imagine that the creature which pursued me was not killed by my blow, or that her fellows removed her body. Anyhow, it is open to the incredulous to prow! about the caves of the Ungeheuerhorn, and see if anything occurs that may convince them.

THE SONG OF TUBAL-CAIN

THIS is the song of Tubal-cain;
He was a man of brawn and brain.

Long ere the birth of Babylon, its pillars and its porches,
Its gardens hanging in the air so many cubits high,
Where nightly in the scented gloom the flare of cedar torches
Made dim the marvel of the moon and stars within the sky;

Long ere the rise of Nineveh in fertile lands Assyrian—
Sennacherib, Semiramis, their names are futile things!—
Long ere the deep ships sailed from out the harbors of the Tyrian,
And ere the towers of Zion made a bulwark for their kings;

There was a man called Tubal-cain who was a master-builder;
With chisel and with hammer he was first to shape the stone.
Tier upon tier his courses rose to many an eye bewilder,
And firm still his foundations stand in desert lands and lone.

The seed he sowed with patience, though his heart was without pity,
Has flourished down the ages upon hillside and on plain;
Go walk to-day along the streets of many a mighty city,
And lift your eyes and see the fruit—the fruit of Tubal-cain!

Clinton Scollard

The Mistake

HOW WYNCOME GORTON BEGAN A NEW CHAPTER IN HIS LIFE

By Ellis Parker Butler

THE death of Wyncome Gorton's father hit him like a splash of ice-cold water in the face. He was still gasping for breath when he ran to Doris Sunlight and told her all about it—which was the worst thing he could have done, but just like him. When he had wept, and had spent half an hour in explaining that now he saw the true light, and would put aside carnal things forever, Doris laughed.

"Oh, boy!" she said. "I don't know what you're talking about, Winny, but—fifty thousand dollars! Me for the white lights and the high spots from now on! How about some good eats right now? This news makes me hungry."

"But you don't understand," Gorton said, with such deep earnestness that tears stood in his eyes. "It is renunciation. It is a new and better life—a life into which you cannot follow me."

Doris laughed again, and a remarkably hard and cold laugh it was.

"Say, listen!" she said. "Where do you get that 'can't follow' stuff, Winny? You watch me! Not follow fifty thousand dollars? Listen to him!"

Wyncome Gorton buried his face in his hands and moaned.

"Let me give this to you straight, Winny," Doris said. "I don't understand this talk about going back to your old ideals and taking up the great work, and all that, but it looks to me like a plain case of trying to throw me down just because a bunch of money comes to you. It won't work! You don't chuck me like that, Winny. I don't stand for it. I've got letters. How many times do you think you've asked me to marry you, you poor coot? And now you're going to!"

"I was mad—mad!" groaned Gorton.

"Well, look out how you treat me, or I'll be the one that's mad—mad," Doris

told him. "When I'm mad—mad, I'm real mad—mad, too. You go home now and think it over. You've got the pip or something, or you wouldn't act this way. Imagine! Coming to me and saying 'I've got fifty thousand real dollars now; go chase yourself!'"

Gorton arose. He wiped his eyes and went out.

"Hey! Ain't you going to kiss me?" Doris fired after him, and then laughed as she closed the door.

"He's a poor shrimp," she said; "but anybody's fifty thousand looks thoroughly good to me. I'd be a nice one to let it get away, wouldn't I? Watch me!"

Gorton returned to his room in Mrs. Brait's boarding house, threw himself on his narrow bed, and wept. Doris put on her best hat—she had two—and visited Marcus M. Greenbaum, a lawyer who knew just how to handle young men and old men who had written letters that should never have been written.

"It's a cinch," Mr. Greenbaum said cheerfully. "I give you my word it's a cinch, Miss Sunlight. We sue for one hundred thousand dollars damages, and we get maybe the whole fifty thousand off him. I write a letter to-day, and if he don't come across and marry you in a week we get busy with the courts. Is he a fighter?"

"Him?" said Miss Sunlight scornfully. "He's a wilted shrimp, that's all. Honest, Mr. Greenbaum, I never knew why I took up with him, he was such a lemon. I must have had a hunch."

"Wunst in a while we get them hunches," agreed Mr. Greenbaum. "All right! This is my busy day. Good luck!"

II.

THIS was no conspiracy; it was a deserted young lady trying to secure justice.

It is not to the point that Doris Sunlight was merely a member of the second row of the chorus of Jack Hardon's "Ladies of Leisure" burlesque company, or that she was thirty years old. She had her rights, and she meant to maintain them.

Wyncome Gorton, stretched across his bed and in tears, had no doubt whatever that Doris meant to maintain her rights. She had a mouth which meant that she was one of the most unyielding maintainers in the world when fifty thousand dollars was in sight.

The whole affair of Doris Sunlight, as he saw only too plainly now, had been an awful mistake. It seemed a hideous nightmare. He felt that he must indeed have been mad. His misery now was as great as his mad elation had been when he first found Doris willing to play with him.

Gorton had been astonished that Doris even so much as looked at him. He knew he was not much to look at, and this made him meek. He was in many respects the meekest young man in New York. He was also awkward and inept. He was often on the wrong side of the walk, where the hurrying crowds bumped into him; then he begged people's pardon and tried to efface himself against the wall.

For a youth of twenty-one years he was ridiculously girlish and simple. He blushed constantly. In time it was likely that his retreating chin would have a few straggling yellow hairs on it. At fifty he would be a timid little man, bald, with thick-lensed spectacles, nervous, and always losing his umbrella. He would wear rubbers on damp days, and would be an exceedingly faithful pastor of a starved church in southern Illinois or middle Iowa, or perhaps a missionary to China. Now, at twenty-one, he possessed less gumption than the average boy of eighteen and less boldness than a kitten.

At nineteen he had told his father that he meant to be a minister of the gospel. His father, who had been a horse buyer and had become part owner of a gambling establishment, had told him to go to the devil.

"Why, you poor ninny!" he told Wyncome. "You poor half baked loon! Here I am ready to set you up in any sort of decent business you take a mind to, and you want to be a preacher. Listen, Winny—you ain't got the looks of a preacher, or the jaw action for one, or nothing. Have

some sense—let me buy you a store or something. All my life, since you was so high, I been worrying about you—afraid you wasn't maybe all on hand in the upper story. No offense, but I've been afraid maybe you wasn't all there. I've planned things out so that when I set you up in business I could keep a lookout for you and hand you some sound advice when you needed it. Now what kind of help can I give you if you go into this preacher game? None! That's one game where I can't stand by and pass you an ace when you need it most, boy. Forget it, won't you, and let me set you up in something I can help you at—won't you, boy?"

"I can't," Wyncome had said sadly. "This is something I must do. I can't help it. I am dragged on by something within me."

"That's the deal, is it?" his father asked. "That's the last card in your deck? You mean that?"

"Irrevocably," Wyncome had assured his father.

"Then go to the devil! I'm done," Gorton, Sr., had said.

Coming down to New York, aglow with independence and with the great vision of helping his fellow men, Wyncome Gorton ran right flat up against the problem of three meals a day and a place to sleep. These things were quite necessary, and he took the first job that offered. It was that of collecting money for an installment house. It was the hardest work a diffident young fellow could have chosen. He tramped the streets, climbed stairs, had doors slammed in his face, met scowls, and was cursed now and then. Once he was kicked.

The vision sustained Gorton nobly at first. Ridiculous as his aspiration might have seemed to others, it was supremely noble to Gorton. It was, indeed, essentially noble in itself. He had consecrated his life to the service of his fellow men, through the pulpit. His narrow present seemed to him like a dark gully between the hills, out of which he would soon fight his way into the wide-spreading valley of glorious service and self-sacrifice. Never was consecration more complete or more sincere.

The job he had found had compensations, too. He had his evenings and nights for study, and the pay was sufficient to allow him to buy a few books and to put by

a few dollars. In time—perhaps not for many years, but that did not matter—he would be able to take up his studies in a seminary. In the miserable confines of the cheap boarding house he studied and struggled and became enormously lonely.

The loneliness of a devotee is not like other forms of loneliness. Always behind the door is the haunting specter of doubt. It comes out when the flesh grows weak from overstudy, and when the spirit sinks from weariness.

"Do I believe?" is the agony of all who do believe, and in the loneliness of the boarding house and of the huge city Wyncome Gorton had to wrestle with his specter alone.

Two years of this was a great deal of it. He had to carry his great vision and his vast plan of service alone.

One Sunday he had dared to wait for a famous clergyman after the morning service, and had told him of his high hopes. The great man had been kind.

"There is no nobler service," he had said, after he had listened to the young man; "but you should consider well before you decide."

It sounded like saying, "You don't look like good material to me," and Wyncome knew that was what the great man was thinking.

This did not alter the youth's intention, but it left him lonelier than ever. It was when his depression was at its greatest depth that he met Doris Sunlight.

III

In the weeks that followed he was not himself; he was no one he had ever known. All the wild oats of his whole life were cast in a heap in those few weeks, and flared up and overtopped him. He went mad, as a starving, fasting hermit goes mad, and forgot everything but Doris Sunlight.

Nothing else mattered. He was like one blind, deaf, berserk. Sometimes, late at night, he wept and beat himself with his fists, but he did not mean it. He was infatuated. He was as mad as the violently insane.

To Doris Sunlight he was, during those weeks, merely an odd but most acceptable "meal ticket." Somehow she had to get through the weeks of rehearsal until the "Ladies of Leisure" began to draw pay, and Wyncome Gorton would serve as well as another.

"He's awful!" she said to herself. "He's the prize hick, for fair, but ladies must live. Maybe I can stand him until the pay envelopes begin. Then the can for him mighty quick!"

Doris was as hard as old-fashioned cut nails. She knew life, and she had her opinion of it.

"Sure, he's a lemon," she admitted to her dearest chum; "but one lemon's as good as another while it has juice in it. I got to eat, ain't I? Say, listen, Mag—what's the sense fussing around for a gent in a fur coat when this thing simply falls in my lap?"

As a love affair, it had all the beauty of a hard-faced Bowery prize fighter jerking around a skinny monkey at the end of a chain. Doris Sunlight had all the knowledge in the world, and Gorton had none of it. Gorton was simply mad. He was having a brain storm of love brought on by loneliness and brooding.

The revulsion was sure to come sooner or later. The hermit always repents bitterly and returns to his water cress and solitude. With Gorton, repentance came when his father's death struck him like a splash of cold water in his face. He awakened from his madness in a moment, and saw the hideousness of his behavior with frightful clearness.

Gorton knew what he must do. He had been like a train that had run unexpectedly upon a side track; he must get back on the main line at once. He did not make light of his fall from grace, but he knew that others had so fallen and yet lived to do such goodly work as he meant to do. There must be no further faltering, however. The thing must end at once. He must go to Doris Sunlight and tell her so.

He came from his interview with her dazed and frightened. This he had not expected. In his misery he had told her all his hopes and intentions. He had expected that she, a girl of the theaters, would at once renounce him, a man of the lowly church. Instead of renouncing him, she claimed him fiercely.

The next day Gorton received a letter from Marcus M. Greenbaum. For an hour he sat in his hall bedroom, his face hidden in his hands, and considered his life as it must be if he married Doris.

It would be a ruined life. It could be nothing, he believed, but long years of the life he had been leading for the past few

weeks. However high he might aspire, she would drag him down. His work would be hampered, made of no avail. "You shall not yoke the ox and the ass together."

He thought of flight, but how could one fly from the law, when the law had a hundred thousand eyes and a hundred thousand hands? Go where he might, Marcus M. Greenbaum and Doris Sunlight would follow him until they had ruined his career.

In his desperation Wyncome Gorton went out and bought a pistol. He bought it with shame, thinking that the man who sold it would know for what purpose he wanted it. The salesman may have guessed, but a sale is a sale, and if one man does not sell another will. Those who, all over the country, have their windows decked temptingly with firearms probably justify the crime-suggesting displays on this theory.

Back in his room, Gorton sat on his bed and felt a mighty fear of the huge weapon he had purchased. In his small room and on his small bed the blue-black pistol seemed as formidable as a cannon. Its discharge threatened to be as loudly tremendous as the explosion of a battery of heavy artillery.

He saw then that this room in which he had lived so long was not the place to do this thing. The landlady would come running in. Miss Toosey, whose nerves were so touchy, would come running in and scream and faint. The other boarders would rush in and make the remarks they might be expected to make.

Under his bed Gorton had a brown leather suit case, on one side of which his initials were painted—W. G. He knelt down by the bed, as he had knelt so often in prayer, and drew out the suit case. He dusted it with his towel and packed it with his few belongings, putting the blue-black pistol at the bottom. He took his fortune—all in ten Liberty bonds—from the secret place he had found for it, and put it into his coat pocket. He washed his hands carefully, and rescued the pink soap when it fell on the floor.

At the door he looked back. There was dust on the bed, where he had placed the suit case while packing, and he went back and knocked off the dust with his hand.

Looking at the room again, he saw his ink bottle on the narrow shelf. This reminded him that he must tell Doris that he meant to end his life. He put down his

suit case and opened the drawer of his small table. There was paper, but no envelopes, and he decided that he could write to her later. He stole out of the house and congratulated himself that he had not been seen.

IV

At the Pennsylvania Station he learned that the first train he could take for Philadelphia was No. 3, leaving at nine o'clock in the evening. No. 19, he was told, had just gone.

"Nine train gets to Broad Street at eleven forty-five," the ticket agent told him.

"I'll take a ticket, then," Gorton said. "If you please," he added.

With the ticket in his hand, he went to the wicket. There was no delay, and he was glad. He did not care to stand around. He went down the iron stairs, found a coach, and entered it. There were many vacant seats. He took one, and arranged his suit case so that it might not inconvenience whoever should chance to sit beside him.

The coach filled rapidly.

"Not taken?" a passenger asked, pausing beside Gorton.

"No, not taken," Gorton replied.

The stranger seated himself. From time to time he looked over his shoulder toward the door, and he seemed relieved when the train began to move. He was older than Gorton, and had a hard face and cruel gray eyes.

Before the train was fairly into the tunnel he had out a time table and scanned it, putting it back into his pocket. Once he stood up and looked from end to end of the car. He drew his own brown leather suit case up on his knees and unstrapped it, opening it only enough to allow his hand to slide inside. He felt in the suit case, closed it, and strapped it again. Then he looked at Gorton.

"Excuse me," Gorton said huskily, "but I'm going to Philadelphia. I don't know anything about Philadelphia. Do you know a hotel there? Not a costly hotel—just an ordinary hotel."

"There's the Gray Eagle," the stranger said. "I'm going there. That's a fair to middling hotel. You can get a room for three dollars. I don't call it much of a hotel, but it's near the station and everything. Going to be there long?"

Gorton swallowed.

"No—not very long," he said still more huskily.

"It ought to do well enough for you, then," said the stranger. "I'll go there with you, if you want me to. We can take a taxi together."

They conversed as the train hurried across New Jersey. The stranger talked far more than Gorton talked. He seemed nervous and eager to make the time pass rapidly by talking. He told Gorton his name, Henry Gibbings, and said that he was from Danbury, Connecticut. He was going to Philadelphia, he said, but he did not mean to stop there. He had to go to Washington the next day. He was in the insurance business, he told Gorton.

"He's lying to me," Gorton told himself. "I wonder why he is lying! There is no reason why he should lie to me, unless—"

He chilled as he thought that this man might be a detective sent by Marcus M. Greenbaum to shadow him, if that was what it was called. But no matter—shadowed or not, the morning would not find Gorton except among even more elusive shadows.

He let the stranger ramble on, heaping lie on lie. The train arrived at Philadelphia on time.

The Gray Eagle was more of a hotel than Gorton had expected. It had its share of gilt and flummery in the lobby, but this concerned him very little. He followed the stranger to the clerk's desk, and registered as he saw the stranger register. He had never registered at a hotel before, but he knew that it was required.

The clerk was using the telephone. When he had finished, he turned the register and looked at the names just written.

"I can give you a double room for five dollars, or single rooms at three," he said. "We want two single rooms," said the stranger.

"Yes—single rooms," said Gorton.

The clerk jotted a number opposite each name, took two keys from the pigeonholes, and slid them to the edge of the counter.

"Boy! Boy!" he called sharply, and two bell boys hurried to pick up the room keys and the two suit cases.

"Twelve, George," said Gorton's boy, as he entered the elevator.

"Eleven," said the stranger's boy.

The elevator shot upward. The stranger still talked.

"Well, good night," he said, as he stepped from the car at the eleventh floor. "See you again in the morning, shouldn't wonder."

The corridor down which the bell boy led Gorton was softly carpeted, and two corners were turned before he stopped at the door of No. 1254. The boy unlocked the door, turned on the lights, glanced into the bathroom to see that towels were there, and waited a moment after he had inserted the key in the door on the inside of the lock.

"Oh, yes," said Gorton, and gave the boy a quarter. He had heard that it was usual to give the bell boy a tip.

"Thank you—good night," the boy said then, and closed the door behind him.

Gorton stepped to the door and turned the key. He looked around the room. In comparison with the hall bedroom he had occupied so long, it was palatial. The carpet on the floor was thick and soft; the paper on the wall was unfaded and fresh; there were three pictures, framed and glazed; the bed was neat and clean, and a folded gray blanket was at its foot.

Through the single window Gorton looked out over a vast city, glittering with lights. He could see an electric sign twinkling on and off. He pulled down the shade, took off his overcoat, and threw it on a chair. He looked into the bathroom, where the boy had left a light burning. Here was the place!

Suddenly he felt unutterably weary—physically weary, and weary of life. The boy had placed the suit case on a small stand evidently meant for just such a purpose. Gorton walked to it and put his hand on the handle to open it; but as he did so, his eye fell on a book which he knew must be a Bible. It lay on the night table beside the bed. He took it up and read:

Placed in this hotel by the Gideons.

He opened the book, and began to read at the place his eyes alighted on.

For an hour Gorton read, and then he remembered the letter that he meant to write to Doris Sunlight. He opened the drawer in his table, and found there pen, ink, paper, and envelopes.

The letter he wrote was too long and too complex for Doris. She never did quite understand all that Wyncome wrote; but she understood that he thought his life

ruined if yoked with hers, and that he meant to destroy himself in order to escape.

When he had completed the letter he addressed an envelope, sealed the letter in it, found a stamp in his pocket, and went to the door. He unlocked the door and opened it, looking up and down the hall. A guest passed.

"Excuse me, please," said Gorton, "but can you tell me how I can mail a letter?"

"Easiest thing, friend," said the man cheerfully. "There's a chute at the elevator, and all you have to do is drop it in."

"Which way is the elevator?" Gorton asked.

"Lost in a great city, hey?" joked the man. "Right down that way. Turn to the left, and then to the left again, and you'll bump into it."

"Thank you," said Gorton. "I'm not used to hotels."

"You're in luck!" the man laughed. "Good night."

V

BACK in his room again, Gorton locked his door once more. There was no escape now. The time had come!

He pitied himself weakly, and thought of what might have been, and of the good he might have done, had he been able to live his life as he wished, free from Doris Sunlight; but that was impossible now. He unbuckled the straps of the suit case, laid it open on the little stand—and stared. This was not his suit case! There met his gaze shirts he had never owned, ties he had never seen, a coat he had never worn.

He was staring down at these things when three peremptory raps sounded on his door.

"Yes!" he said. "Yes—one minute!"

Closing the suit case, he went to the door and opened it. A man who stood outside pushed past him into the room and closed the door, locking it and putting the key in his pocket. He was a heavy man, severe of face. He glared at Gorton—frowned at him.

"You know what I'm here for, don't you? I'm the house detective," he said.

"Here for? You? House detective?" stammered Gorton, panic-stricken. "No, I don't know. I—I haven't done anything wrong, have I?"

He had a miserable feeling that he must have broken some rule of the hotel. Perhaps lights were supposed to be out at a

certain hour. Perhaps he should not have put the letter in the chute so late at night.

"Don't give me any nonsense, now!" said the detective harshly. "Don't you know what I'm here for?"

"Ought—ought I to have the lights out?" asked Gorton. "Is it the lights? I didn't know, if that is what it is."

"Don't you know what I'm here for? Talk up, now! Don't you know?"

"No, sir. If it's anything—I'm sorry—I didn't mean—" said poor Gorton.

"You came into the hotel with another man, didn't you?" asked the detective. "You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," said Gorton.

Suddenly he thought he knew what this was all about. It was the other man's suit case. They thought he had stolen it.

"Well, what about him? Who is he? What do you know about him?" the detective asked.

"About him?" faltered Gorton. "I don't know anything about—I mean he told me his name. He rode from New York with me, but I never set eyes on him before that. I asked him what was a good hotel to come to, and he told me about this one. We came here in the same taxi. He said his name was—"

"Never mind that! We know his name well enough. What else do you know about him? Know where he came from?"

"He said he was from Danbury, Connecticut," said Gorton, "but I didn't believe that. I thought he was lying. I thought he was lying all the time he was talking. I wondered why he thought he had to lie to me."

"And you never saw him before you got on the train? You never knew him before that? He was no friend of yours?"

"Oh, I hope he was my friend," said Gorton eagerly. "I hope I made him something of a friend. I try to make all men my friends—"

"Never mind about that!" said the detective. "I've no time to waste with that. You don't know anything about him—is that it? Sure you don't?"

"No, sir; I don't," said Gorton.

"All right!" said the detective, suddenly changing his manner. "You've got to excuse the way I went at you. Sometimes we can get at things by throwing a good scare into a man right at the first jump, but I guess you're straight. When a thing like this happens in a hotel—"

"What has happened?" asked Gorton hoarsely. "What has happened?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the detective. "This fellow you hope is your friend, this Wyncome Gorton down in No. 1134, has shot and killed himself."

"But—but that's not his name!" stammered Gorton. "He's not—"

The detective thrust his hand at Gorton imperatively.

"Now, listen," he said. "Don't try to tell me, because I know. I don't care what he told you his name was. I know what he registered when he signed the register, and I know what the stuff in his suit case proves his name is. There's plenty there to prove it—letters from some girl, and plenty of other letters. One's from a lawyer. That's where the reason he suicided comes in, if you ask me. The girl was after him through the lawyer."

Gorton wet his lips stealthily.

"And he's dead?" he asked in a whisper.

"Dead for keeps," said the detective, and added: "Poor devil!"

VI

WHEN the door had closed behind the detective, Wyncome Gorton stood looking at nothing for many minutes. He knew what had happened—he had followed the wrong bell boy. In the morning the world would hear that he, Wyncome Gorton, was dead. Marcus M. Greenbaum would hear that he was dead. Doris Sunlight would hear that he was dead. He was free! Even the letter he had written and sent down the mail chute would be added evidence that Wyncome Gorton was no more.

He put his hand to his coat and felt the Liberty bonds in his pocket.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if there is a theological seminary in some town where the 'Ladies of Leisure' are not apt to go! I don't think I would care to meet Miss Sunlight again, now that I'm dead."

ROOM FOR A MAN

OH, there's not much room to spare

On a ship that sails the sea;

There's ten steps from lee to port,

And ten back from port to lee.

In the city's huddled streets

There is not much room to spare—

And what's true of sea and town

Is the same thing everywhere.

Where the plains and forests roll,

Where snow-sifted mountains rise,

You can only fill the place

That your body occupies.

That is all the body holds

To the day of death, from birth;

But the space that bounds your soul—

That is measured by your worth.

And though some accept the dark,

Broken by unnumbered wars,

Others win their way at last

To the height that bounds the stars!

Yet, no matter how you thrive,

What your race or creed or clan,

Everywhere on sea and land

There is room to be a man!

Harry Kemp

Like a Leopard

HOW JOHNNY BRECKENBRIDGE RECEIVED A NEW LIGHT ON
THE NATURE OF A GOOD WIFE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

IT was a frightful night. Brecky turned up the collar of his overcoat, pulled his cap lower over his eyes, and left the shelter of the railway station for the open road. He heard the train that had brought him from the city pull out again and rush whistling through the fields and marshes. When it had gone, everything human had vanished, leaving him alone with the great and terrible wind and the cold rain.

He made what haste he could along the muddy road, his head down against the gale. The driving rain half blinded him, the tumult confused him, with the unceasing rush of the wind and the dull sound of the sea. His way lay through immeasurable desolation, past house after house empty and black, shops all closed and shuttered, streets in which there was not one human creature. It was a sort of Pompeii, a deserted village, a nightmare; but to the practical Brecky it was nothing more or less than Shorehaven, a summer resort, quite naturally deserted in midwinter.

He was not a man of imagination, this Johnny Breckenbridge. He was a wiry young chap with an impassive, weather-beaten face. He dressed very soberly, but he had an incorrigibly sporting air, and there was something rakish and jaunty about him. He was nimble, alert, and just a trifle bow-legged. He was never tired, never discouraged. He had all his wits about him, and knew his way in the world.

He had been, one might say, born a jockey, and he had been a good one, too, for years; but he had grown tired of the restrictions of a jockey's life. He was fond of eating and drinking, and he liked to be his own master.

He had continued his activities on the race track in a less official capacity. He had done well as a bookie, too, for he was

shrewd, cautious, and trustworthy; but he had suddenly fallen in love and married.

"And that's no life for a married man," he observed to his many friends. "Got to settle down now."

Brecky was thorough in everything, and he wished to be a thoroughly married man. He took his new obligations with great seriousness. He intended to do well for his jolly little Kathleen. He knew that his duty in life was to make money for her.

He never thought of consulting her, however. She had been a waitress in a little restaurant in the city, and he had admired her brisk good humor and her common sense. She was a pretty kid, too—dark, small, vigorous. She had received a great deal of attention, but she was never silly or vain about it. She knew how to take care of herself. She liked a good time, but no monkey business. She was mighty independent, Kathleen was.

To Brecky's uncomplex mind, the wedding ring was to transform her completely. She was to be no longer Kathleen, but a wife; and to him all good wives were alike. They were kind, gentle, contented, and very helpful. You made money gladly for them; but if you were a real man, you didn't let them spend much of it.

He had looked about the world thoughtfully for a few months. Then he had taken nearly every penny he had saved and had bought a hotel at the seaside, with a heavy mortgage on it. To this place he had brought his Kathleen, that she might help and comfort him while he mastered his new business.

Extraordinary friends of his used to come down and give him advice. He listened and learned. He knew a number of men connected with hotels, night clerks, head waiters, and so on; and they were

willing and anxious to help him, because every one liked him.

He had no iconoclastic ideas. He wished to run his hotel according to all the tried and tested rules of the business. He wore out his advisers. Those who came down to look over Brecky's hotel went away exhausted and squeezed dry, leaving whatever valuable knowledge they owned in Brecky's possession.

In midwinter, when the place lay like a frozen village on the shore of an inhuman sea, lights used to shine from the windows of Brecky's immense hotel, and to flit from one floor to another. That meant Brecky and some consulting friend, muffled in sweaters and overcoats, inspecting the rows and rows of bedrooms, discussing the wall paper, the flimsy furniture, debating with breath that congealed in the frigid air, whether this or that room was going to be cool enough, shady enough, airy enough.

But however the lights might flit about the building in those winter nights, there was one that remained steady and constant as the beam from a lighthouse. It came from the kitchen window. It sprang up every evening when dusk began to close in, and it always burned until nine o'clock or so. Brecky saw it now, as he turned the corner and struggled down the street at the end of which his hotel stood.

This was the hardest stretch, in the teeth of the terrific wind blowing inshore. It was like leaving the world and plunging into chaos. He went at it, head down, his eyes fixed upon the cheerful light, an agreeable hunger rising within him. That light meant Kathleen and the excellent dinner she was sure to have ready for him.

II

BRECKY stamped up the wooden steps and across the veranda, opened the front door with his latchkey, and entered the house. It was colder in there than it was outside. The place wasn't designed for winter occupation, and there was no means for heating it. Moreover, its construction was flimsy, and a wind like that now blowing found its way in without trouble, and went moaning through the hall, rattling the doors and windows.

He passed through the dining room. It was entirely dark, but there was no fear of running into anything, for all the tables were drawn back against the walls and the chairs piled on them. He pushed open the

swinging doors into the pantry, and another door, and was suddenly in a different world, warm, light, filled with delightful savors.

"Ah!" he said, with a sigh.

He slipped off his overcoat, cap, and rubbers, and went over to the stove, holding out his numb hands to its welcome heat. Then he turned and kissed his wife, absently, almost without looking at her, in spite of the fact that she was well worth looking at.

"Did Mullins come about those sash cords?" he asked.

"No—no one came. I haven't seen a soul all day," she answered; but he missed the significance of her tone.

She hurried back and forth with steaming dishes, and at last informed him, rather curtly, that his dinner was ready. He sat down at once and ate with good appetite, but in silence and abstraction, because he had to think about those sash cords. At last he finished and leaned back in his chair, ready for the amenities of life.

"Well, Kathleen!" he said. "You're one fine little wife!"

He was innocently oblivious of his wife's state of mind. It hadn't occurred to him that she kept on existing and thinking when he wasn't there. His remark was a match to dry straw.

"A fine little *cook*, I guess you mean!" she said with sudden asperity. "That's your idea of a wife!"

He laughed.

"Well!" he said. "They kind of go together, don't they?"

"Looks like it," she said; "only some cooks get paid."

It was his habit to ignore remarks like that. Women, he considered, were often fanciful and "touchy." It was better to leave them alone at such times. He lighted a big cigar, deliberately took his mind off his wife and all domestic concerns, and began to meditate on his business.

But the perverse creature continued to exist and to speak.

"I didn't start out in life to be a cook," she said, in an ominously calm and reasonable tone. "I'm glad enough to do it for your sake, Johnny; but I'd like you to remember that I'm not used to this kind of life."

"Yes, yes!" he said soothingly, and continued to smoke and stare at the fire.

"You never even look at me!" she cried suddenly.

"Yes, but I do!" he protested. "Sure I do!"

He looked at her then, with a smile, and saw that she was crying.

"For the Lord's sake, what's the matter?" he asked, with despairing good nature. "I'll look at you for an hour, if you like; only don't cry, that's a good girl!"

She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and went on crying. He swore under his breath, and, getting up, went around the table and put his arm about her.

"Come now!" he said. "You're as pretty as a picture, and you know I love you."

"Yes!" she said. "You want to make it up quickly and forget all about me!"

He couldn't help laughing at the woman's cleverness.

"Well!" he said. "If I do think such a lot about this business, who's it for? Don't be silly! It's all for you."

"It isn't! It's because you like it. You'd go on with it just the same if I was dead!"

He was a little in doubt what to do. Should he ignore her, and let her get over her inopportune temper alone? Or should he wheedle her?

He was really annoyed. He thought it all rather touching and feminine. They were all like that—wanted a man to spend his time making love and playing the fool; and yet, if he didn't provide all they wanted, or thought they wanted, they'd nag him to death. He kissed her again.

"We'll go in to the city some day next week," he said. "We'll take in a show, and all that. That's what you need."

"It isn't! What I need is some one to talk to. You never want to listen to me. You never ask me what I've been doing."

"But there's nothing you could do," he answered innocently, "except cooking and sewing and—"

He was really surprised at her outbreak, she was usually so cheerful and equable. He looked at her flushed and furious face, the tears still in her eyes, and an unpleasant conviction came to him that this was going to be serious—and lasting.

"You come in," she went on, "and you sit down and eat your dinner, and the only thing you can find to say to me is to call me a cook!"

"I said you were a fine little cook," he began ingratiatingly. "Nothing wrong in that, is there? Why, I'm proud of you,

Kathleen! Only this afternoon I was telling Sawyer how you could cook."

"Well, you'd just better find something else to praise me for!" she cried. "I'm something more than a cook, and the sooner you learn it the better!"

He was astounded and somewhat shocked at her violence—dismayed, too. He had an uneasy feeling that he couldn't handle this situation adequately. So, according to his habit, he decided to go away, believing, as many other people believe, that if he weren't in the situation, there would be no situation. But his cool deliberations were upset. Moreover, his cigar was out, and he didn't like relighted cigars.

He got the books in which he was trying to work out a new idea of hotel bookkeeping, but he couldn't do a thing. He couldn't put out of his mind the image of that girl, that provoking and beloved girl, with her angry, rosy little face and her eyes full of tears.

"Women!" he thought savagely.

No denying, though, that she was a wonderful wife and companion. She had never complained before, she had never failed him. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her get up and begin carrying the dishes over to the sink. He thought he would help her, and then he thought he wouldn't. It would be weakness.

Still, it would do no harm to conciliate her. Perhaps, if he did, his working mood would return. He watched her for a few minutes longer, bending over the dish pan. Then he got up, went over to her, and, putting an arm about her, drew her close against him.

Then a devil entered into him.

"Why, you silly kid!" he said, kissing her. "You're the best little cook!"

She turned and gave him a smart box on the ear.

He was so astounded that he couldn't speak. He stared at her flushed and furious face, his own perfectly blank. Then, very slowly, the color began to rise in his lean cheeks.

He was a man slow to anger, a man of self-control and *sang froid*; but when his temper was aroused, it was a bad one. His wife was secretly horrified at what she had done. She hadn't meant to do it. She knew he was only trying to be funny. She was ashamed and alarmed.

"What made you do that?" he asked slowly.

"Because I'm sick and tired of being called a cook, that's why!" she answered valiantly.

"Well, you'd better apologize!" he said.

"Well, I won't!" she answered promptly. "I'm glad I did it. I'm just sick and tired of—of all this—shut up here alone all day long!"

"All right!" said Brecky. "All right!"

She looked at him steadily for a moment. Then she began, very deliberately, to dry her hands. He turned away and walked back to his books, but she saw that his hands were clenched, and she knew that he was filled with fury. She was elated, and she was sorry.

He began figuring, but he grasped his pencil so fiercely that it broke, and he had to get up and look for another.

He saw Kathleen standing before the little mirror she had hung up on the wall, dressed in her fur coat and engaged in pinning on her hat.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Putting on my hat," she answered calmly.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"I'm not going to tell you."

He smiled.

"Well, good-by!" he said.

Taking the key out of the lock, he went out of the kitchen, slamming and locking the door behind him.

"She can stay in there and think it over!" he said to himself.

III

BRECKY made an effort to be light, careless, superior. He whistled as he went upstairs to the two rooms they used on the floor above—one as a bedroom, the other as a sort of office, where Brecky "saw people." He had plenty of material to occupy himself with here—letters and catalogues and estimates and so on. A little gas stove was burning in one corner, and the room was as neat, cheerful, and comfortable as it could be made by Kathleen's benevolent genius.

He had scarcely set foot over the threshold before a pang of remorse assailed him. Wherever his glance fell, there was something to speak of Kathleen and her care for him. He was by no means imaginative, but he was suddenly able to imagine his young wife alone all day in this huge, cold place. He began to have some idea of what her life must be.

"By gosh!" he thought. "After all, I don't know that I blame the poor girl for landing on me!"

And all at once the pathos of the thing overcame him—that poor little bit of a thing flying out at him like that—at him, who could have picked her up and shaken her like a kitten. He shouldn't have teased her. After all, there was more to her than her cooking. He hadn't fallen in love with her for that.

His impulse was to hurry downstairs and make it up; but he didn't see how one could make up a quarrel with a woman without giving her a present. It wasn't decent. Moreover, it would be too difficult. A present relieved a man from the necessity of making any sort of explanation, or of talking at all. You give the present, with a kiss, and it's done.

He walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, haunted by the image of Kathleen angry and Kathleen gay. The more he reflected, the more mysterious and oppressive was his sense of guilt, the more contrite and tender his heart. In the end he came to a decision extraordinary in one so stiff-necked. He resolved to go downstairs and say, quite frankly, that he was sorry, and that he loved her and didn't care whether she cooked or not.

The house seemed blacker and colder than ever as he descended the stairs. He wondered if she was crying in there, or scornfully washing the dishes. He unlocked the door, opened it, and entered.

He couldn't see her at all. He stared about the huge kitchen, which was well lighted. There were the dishes, just as he had last seen them, but no human being. Kathleen had gone!

He couldn't believe it at first. She couldn't have got out by the windows, for the heavy shutters were locked on the outside. There was no possible means of egress from that room except an incredible one; and yet, as she wasn't in the room, she must have got out that way. She must have gone down the flight of rickety wooden steps and through the cellar.

She had always been in mortal fear of the cellar, because there were rats in it. Brecky had always brought up the coal for her when she wanted some. In order to pass through it at night, she must have been in a desperate mood, he thought.

He was more disturbed than he cared to admit. Where could the girl go, alone, on

a night like this, with a regular hurricane blowing? There was nothing for it but to put on his cap and overcoat and go in search of her.

The wrath of a woman had in it something peculiarly alarming and mysterious for Brecky. He felt that Kathleen was capable of the most amazing deeds, that she was not bound by any of his rules or scruples. He couldn't imagine what she would do. He was completely lost.

He opened the front door and stepped out into the tumultuous night. Fortunately there was only one direction in which to go, unless one wished to walk into the sea, and he didn't think that even an enraged wife would do that. There was nothing suicidal about Kathleen, anyhow. She was too sane, too solid, too honestly fond of life.

He was also aware that she was well able to withstand this weather. Where he could go, sturdy as he was, she could go, too. She was vigorous and resolute.

The wind was at his back now. He went with fierce impetus along the empty streets, and he went, inevitably, to the railway station. He entered the warm little waiting room, where a white-bearded agent dozed in his ticket booth.

The man looked up and nodded at Brecky.

"Too late!" he said. "She's gone!"

This might mean either a train or a wife.

"Ten minutes ago," the agent went on, full of the secret triumph he always felt at the spectacle of a thwarted traveler. "You'll have to wait two hours, and mebbe more."

Brecky sat down near the stove and set to work to frame a question which should in no way compromise his wife. He wished to seem aware of all her doings. He couldn't ask whether she had been at the station; but the agent assisted him.

"Your missus would 'a' lost the nine o'clock train herself, if it hadn't 'a' been near half an hour late."

"I'm glad she caught it, anyway," replied Brecky. "It's a case of serious illness. I told her to hurry along, and I'd follow as soon as I could."

"Your phone out of order?" asked the agent.

"Yes," said the quick-witted Brecky. "Did she telephone here?"

"Yep—said to meet the train when it got to the station."

"I wonder who she got on the phone!" said Brecky. "Probably her aunt or her cousin."

Splendid improvisation, for Kathleen hadn't a single relative in the city, to his knowledge!

"It just happens I heard the name," said the agent. "'Charley,' she says, 'I'm coming in unexpected, and you must come and meet me!'"

"I didn't know Charley was in New York," said Brecky thoughtfully.

"She didn't phone New York," said the agent. "I just happened to hear. It was New Chelsea."

"I see!" said Brecky.

IV

He took a cigar out of his pocket and began to smoke, and to think. His impassive face showed no trace of emotion. He was simply waiting for a train; but within he was in a panic, torn with rage, fear, and a frantic desire for action.

Who the devil was Charley? After all, what did he know of Kathleen? What did he know of women, anyway? He had left her alone for days and days, while he looked after business matters in the city. He had left her alone, partly because he wanted to go into the city, because he disliked solitude and quiet. How did he know what she thought of when he was gone? Charley!

He could scarcely endure it. His lean body trembled, like that of a nervous horse held brutally in check. He wanted to bolt. Charley!

Unfortunately, Brecky did not find it difficult to believe evil. His experience of life had been hard and definite. He had as high an opinion of Kathleen as he had ever had of a human being, but he was not trustful. He knew too much, and it was a one-sided knowledge.

It was possible that Kathleen was merely a fool, and didn't realize what she was doing; but this Charley wouldn't be like that. If women were more or less a mystery to Brecky, men were not. He had a sudden and very clear picture of Kathleen, neat, rosy, pitifully self-assured, alighting from the train, to be met by Charley.

All at once he knew who Charley was—that fat, owlish fellow who used to sit so often at Kathleen's table in the restaurant. Sands, his name was. He had money of his own, and used to bother Brecky for tips on the races. He used to sit for hours ab-

sorbed in the form sheets, trying to figure things out for himself—with the usual results. And Kathleen had turned from Brecky, the shrewd, the alert, the competent, to that fellow!

"I've got nearly an hour to wait, haven't I?" he asked.

Brecky's voice rang out sharply in the quiet little room. The agent opened his eyes, more startled than the words warranted. He fancied there was something in the other man's tone. He stared at him, instantly wide awake.

"I guess I'll have time to run home and get something," Brecky went on.

"Don't be late, though," said the agent. "This'll be the last train to-night."

Brecky vanished, slamming the door behind him. He retraced his steps with dreamlike ease. He was not conscious of progressing until he found himself once more at the hotel. He was filled with emotions so violent, with such a confusion of hatred, jealousy, and pain, that he was truly overwhelmed. His inarticulate soul could find no other words for his anguish than—

"No one's going to make a fool of *me*!"

He put his hand into his coat pocket for the key of the front door, but it wasn't there. He was obliged to go around to the back of the house and enter through the cellar. He felt his way through the piercing cold of that black underground cavern, and ascended the shaking wooden steps to the kitchen.

The kitchen gave him a shock. It was exactly as he had left it, neat, quiet, warm, with the clock ticking, the kettle gently steaming, Kathleen's apron across a chair. It was like the memory of a past irretrievably gone. Brecky's heart contracted with pain. He stopped for a moment, to muster all the resolution he had.

He went upstairs into the bedroom, and from a drawer of the bureau he took what he wanted. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, saw his face strained and hard beneath his inevitable cap, and he thought he looked like a criminal in the movies. Well, why shouldn't he?

He caught the train. He got in and settled himself comfortably in the smoking car, deserted except for two men playing pinochle.

The train ran on smoothly, stronger than the wind. Brecky could see very little from the window except the slanting rain and now and then a blurred light. The turmoil

in his brain never ceased. He looked unpleasantly wide awake, staring, like a somnambulist. His gray eyes never seemed to blink, or his face to move a muscle.

And for all his grief and fury he had no other words than that pitifully inadequate refrain:

"No one's going to make a fool of *me*!"

His cigar was out, but he did not notice it. He sat with a curiously alert air, like a pointing dog, immobile, but terribly ready. He was thinking.

He stopped the conductor as he passed through the car.

"Can you stop at New Chelsea?" he asked.

The conductor shook his head.

"It's not an express stop," he said. "You'll have to go on to New York and then take a train back. You'll have to wait till to-morrow morning, too. No more trains to-night!"

Brecky reflected. He took it for granted that if Kathleen had telephoned to the fellow at New Chelsea, that was where he lived, and where he was most likely to be found. He pulled at the conductor's sleeve as the man was moving away.

"Do you slow down anywhere near there?"

"Not enough for—"

"Just you tell me when you're going to slow down a bit," said Brecky. "I've got to get there. You won't be responsible."

"I should be," said the conductor sentimentously. "Morally speaking, I should be responsible."

Brecky knew every inch of that line. As they approached the desired destination, he got up and went out upon the platform. The pinochle players saw him standing there, in the wind and the rain. Then, suddenly, he vanished. He had climbed down the steps and jumped.

The fall stunned him, and he lay still for an instant. When he could breathe freely again, he rose, and mechanically tried to brush himself off. He was always a neat fellow.

The train had disappeared, and he was alone in the universe. He could still hear the sea, dull and menacing, and the demoniac wind still blew. He didn't quite know where he was. His plan was to follow the tracks.

Wet to the skin, a sinister enough figure with his face nearly hidden by pulled down cap and turned up collar, he went doggedly

forward toward the next station. He presented the appearance of a highwayman.

Before long he saw the feeble light of the New Chelsea station ahead of him, blurred through the rain. With a sigh of relief he mounted the wooden platform, where he was for the moment sheltered from the weather.

He tried to open the door, but it was locked. He looked in through the window, and saw the dimly lit room, quite empty, and the stove, without fire. Evidently the station master had gone for the night. This was a blow to Brecky, for he had counted upon making inquiries here.

He prowled around the platform, scowling, trying to plan his course. To his right he saw a few scattered lights, which must be, he thought, the village of New Chelsea; and he went toward them, along a muddy road. In due time he reached the main street. There was a drug store, closed and locked, with a ghostly green light in the window. There was also a protective light in the window of a well stocked grocery; but not a human being to be seen, not a sound to be heard, except the yelping of a dog somewhere in the hills that rose behind the town and partly sheltered it from the wind. Only a sudden cruel gust, from time to time, met him full in the face.

He turned a corner, and at the end of the street he saw a distant form, walking with a slow and deliberate step very familiar to him. It was a policeman, and Brecky hastened after him.

"I've lost my bearings," he said. "Is Charley Sands's place anywhere near here?"

The policeman hesitated for a moment, with rural caution.

"What do you want to go there for?" he asked.

"Well," said Brecky, laughing, "I suppose because I don't want to walk around New Chelsea all night in this weather. Three of us started here in a motor, but we broke down a little way up the line, and we couldn't get our bearings. We each tried a different direction, and I guess I'm the lucky one. Charley will have to turn out with a lantern to find the other fellows."

"Oh, they'll be all right!" said the policeman, disarmed. "There's houses and little settlements all around this part of the country."

He directed Brecky to the house of Charley Sands. A good walk, about three

miles, he should say—uphill, and mighty hard to find in the dark.

"Oh, I'll find it all right!" said Brecky cheerfully.

V

He very nearly found something else that night. He lost his way entirely. He went on, as in a dream, along muddy roads, up hills so steep that he thought his weary heart would burst. He would not admit his intolerable fatigue, and the frightful ravages made by passion and bitterness. He wished to continue, inexorably, until he had accomplished his object.

The country was unfamiliar and hostile to this denizen of cities. When at last his strength was wholly gone, he did not know where to turn. He dared not wake any of the people in the dark farmhouses he passed. He crept up to a barn once, but a dog drove him away.

At last, at very last, he found an open shed behind a church, used as a shelter for the buggies and the Fords of the worshippers; and he crouched in there, relieved for a time from the unendurable confusion of the dark and the wind. His cigars and matches were dry and safe in an inside pocket, and he began to smoke. He hadn't the slightest wish to sleep. He didn't even feel tired. He only wanted to stop for a moment, to secure a pause in his superhuman exertions. He knew very well that if he hadn't found this refuge, he would have been defeated.

Wide-eyed and reflective, he sat in his corner until he observed that the stormy dark was changing its aspect, that it was growing faintly and drearily gray. It surprised him. He had forgotten that morning was ever coming again. He got up and set out on his way once more.

An extraordinary thought occurred to him. It would have been better, he said to himself, if he had died. He had lost Kathleen; why was he to live? What had he left?

He had no longer any heart for revenge. He was sorry he had to see it through; but, according to his queer code, it was absolutely necessary to vindicate himself. Otherwise his self-respect would be gone, and he could neither live nor die in peace.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he approached the house of Charley Sands, which an early stirring laborer had pointed out to him. He had planned that hour. He

had also looked up the time of the train he meant to take—when he had finished. It was due to his self-respect to make a valiant effort to escape, although he didn't really care.

It was a trim white house surrounded by placid lawns. He went up to it with careless audacity, his hand grasping the revolver in his pocket. What did he care? Let Sands see him, let him ask what he wanted; he would soon find out!

Brecky had made himself neater, after his horrible night, than almost any other man could have done; but at best he looked haggard and menacing. He knew it, and was glad.

The weather had cleared, but he was still wet to the skin and cold, although he was not aware of it. He walked along the gravel path, which crunched under his firm tread. He was making no effort to conceal his presence. He wished to be observed, to bring this thing to its climax, to be done with it.

He ran up on the veranda, and, with one of those queer impulses of an abstracted mind, instead of ringing the bell, he knocked sharply on the door. He heard some one coming down the stairs, and he smiled. If it was Charley—

But it was not. It was an entirely strange young woman, who looked at him with distrust. He was so taken aback that he could not speak. He stared and stared at her.

"Well?" she demanded impatiently.

"Sands here?" he managed to ask.

"What do you want with him?"

Brecky hesitated. His tired brain, flung loose from the pivot of his fixed idea, spun round helplessly. He couldn't really think at all. Another woman here!

He was roused by the sight of her preparing to shut the door in his face. He set his foot against it.

"I want to see him," he said. "You call him!"

She was alarmed then, and began to call "Charley!" in a shrill voice.

Down the stairs came bounding the fat and owlish young man.

"Well!" he cried. "Brecky!"

The young woman frowned.

"He didn't say who he was," she said.

"I didn't know. Come in!"

Brecky entered, still dazed. They didn't seem at all surprised to see him, even at that hour of the morning, and in the lam-

entable state he was in. He sat down uninvited, threw off his cap, and lighted a cigar.

"This is my wife, Brecky," said Sands, in a tone of severe rebuke. "Kathleen's second cousin, you know."

"All right!" said Brecky.

His manners, usually punctilious, had deserted him entirely. What he wanted was for these people to clear out of their own room, and let him think for a moment; but the young woman sat down opposite him. She was rather nice-looking, in a shrewish way, but obviously hostile.

"She's here," she said.

Brecky sprang up.

"Let me see her!" he cried.

"I don't think she wants to see you," said the young woman. "I don't blame her. If she takes my advice, she'll never go back to you!"

Brecky looked at her steadily. He felt, however, that it was better not to say what he thought just then.

"You're just making a drudge out of her," the other went on. "It's a shame—a pretty, lively young girl like Kathleen shut up in that awful place! All you care about is getting your meals cooked. I wouldn't do it for any man. She's sick and tired of it, I can tell you—being your cook. If she takes my advice, she'll go back to her old job, where she'll have a little money to spend and see a little life."

"All right!" said Brecky again. "But maybe she doesn't want to take your advice. Anyway, I'd like to ask her."

"Well, I hope she won't see you. I know what you'll do—make all sorts of promises, till you get her back there again, and then she can go right on cooking!"

"Do I see her, or don't I?" asked Brecky, still quite calm.

"I'll see," said the peppery young woman, and went off and left him alone.

He had a new idea to contend against, and one for which there was in his experience no precedent. He could comprehend an elopement, but any subtler reason for his wife's leaving him was extremely hard for him to grasp. It was his habit, though, to face facts, and he tried now.

He tried to imagine Kathleen as a human being, and not as his wife; but he failed. What more could the girl want? He was filled with rage at her ingratitude, and at the humiliating position she had got him into. He was certainly being made a

fool of, for the first time. He had done his best, had worked for her, had been sober, kind, loyal. What more could the girl want?

Whatever it was, she wouldn't get it—that she wouldn't! She had left him, and she could come back, if she wished; but he wasn't going to ask her.

"That's not my way!" he said to himself, with a grimace. "I won't crawl for any one. I haven't done anything. It's all her fault!"

He was half inclined to walk out of the house then and there, but if by any chance Kathleen was going to be sorry, he didn't want to miss it. He discovered that he was extremely anxious for her to be sorry, and that if she were, he might perhaps not be so very angry. She needn't even say it. One nice smile, and the thing would be over.

"I don't know," he thought. "Maybe it has been hard for her. She's only a kid. Of course, it doesn't excuse her running away like that, and making such a fool of me, but—well, I don't know. Maybe, later on, I'll get a servant for her. I could afford it."

VI

BRECKY wheeled about, for some one had entered the room. It was the rebellious Kathleen herself. She seemed to him to have grown miraculously prettier overnight, and he was still less angry.

"Well, Johnny?" she demanded.

He resented that tone very much.

"Well!" he said affably.

There was a long silence.

"I'm taking the nine forty train home," said Brecky. "Coming?"

"No," said she.

Without another word, he picked up his cap and made for the door; but he was met by Charley Sands.

"Here! Here!" said he. "Stay and have some breakfast first, old son!"

"All right!" said Brecky.

He wanted breakfast badly. He also wanted to show Kathleen how unconcerned he was, that he was not hurt and bewildered and angry. He stood in the hall, talking to Charley. He was aware of Kathleen's

voice in a near-by room, talking to that vixenish young woman.

"Married life's a great thing!" said Charley dismally.

"Sure is!" said Brecky.

He couldn't imagine how any man could marry if he couldn't marry Kathleen. He despised and hated Kathleen, but in common justice he had to acknowledge to himself that she was the prettiest and sweetest girl in the world, and utterly superior to all other women. She was—

Just then he heard her speaking. She had a clear voice that carried well.

"No," she was saying. "I think I'll make some pancakes for Johnny's breakfast. But see here—you needn't tell him I made 'em, Grace. I don't want him to think—but he looks dead tired, and he does love pancakes!"

That did for Brecky. He ran down the hall and pushed open a door. It opened into the kitchen, and Kathleen, in an apron, stood at the table, before a large bowl. He paid no attention to the second cousin. He darted around the table and took Kathleen in his arms.

"Oh, come on home!" he said.

She began to cry at once, very comfortably, with her head buried in his coat.

"Don't be silly!" he said anxiously. "See here, Kathleen! Listen! We'll get a cook. We'll go to the theater, and—"

His wife raised her head and kissed him vehemently.

"Oh, Johnny!" she began, but stopped short, dried her eyes, and went on with great dignity. "Johnny," she said, "I wouldn't mind cooking and all that, for you, if you didn't—kind of expect it. *That's* what made me mad last night. You just expect—"

"Well, I won't any more," he assured her. "You come home, and I'll be darned surprised every time I get a meal!"

A few minutes later they all sat down to enjoy Kathleen's matchless pancakes. Eating them, Brecky also partook of the fruit of knowledge.

"You're one grand little cook, Kathleen," he thought; "but this time I won't say it!"

EDITORIAL NOTE—The short story entitled "The Strong Man," published in the September number of this magazine, was the work of Robert T. Shannon, but by an unfortunate error the name of John D. Swain was given as the author. We apologize to both these popular writers for the accidental confusion of their names.

Times Have Changed

A NOVEL OF UP-TO-DATE ADVENTURE IN THE BOHEMIA AND
THE SUBURBIA OF NEW YORK

By Elmer Davis

Author of "The Princess Cecilia," etc.

MARK O'RELL, formerly a New York newspaper man, has served with distinction in the war, and after its conclusion has settled down as principal of the high school in the "garden suburb" of Wynwood, New Jersey. Though happily married, his life is not without its trials. One of his scholars, a flighty girl named Irene Laird, embarrasses him with confidences about her desire to go on the stage. Moreover, he is somewhat oppressed by the extreme respectability of Wynwood and of his wife's numerous relatives, the Redman family. He has a thrill of delight when a college friend, Johnny Zane, invites him to the dinner of a fraternity alumni club in New York.

That evening Aunt Cordelia, one of the Redmans, asks awkward questions about an old Salem quilt, an ancestral relic which was her wedding present to the O'Rells. Mark confesses that he has left it with Bill Corliss, a friend of his newspaper days; but he promises to hunt it up when he goes into town to the fraternity dinner.

Next morning his holiday begins. He first calls at the office of his old newspaper, the *Record*, where he meets Byron Blish, a motion picture press agent. Blish takes him to a musical comedy matinée, and after the performance introduces him to the leading lady, Lorna Lockwood. Then they decide to fill in the remaining time before the dinner with a "little game" at Blish's club.

As the two men leave the theater, Irene Laird appears, and introduces herself to Miss Lockwood as "your cousin Irene, from Wynwood."

VII

"**H**ELLO, cousin!" said Lorna cheerily. "Come for a stay, I see. Well, this is a good town!"

"I knew it would be," Irene admitted. "I've come to be an actress, and I thought you could help me."

"Oh! Well, we strive to please. Come out in the light, where we can look each other over."

They emerged from the alley into the white glare of Broadway, and Lorna inspected her cousin. She saw a shapely, dark girl in a black toque and a cheap black sweater of openwork, its mesh so coarse that it might have been a dyed tennis net. Through the mesh vivid pink shoulder ribbons were visible, and much display of lace. Irene wore a shiny white satin skirt—so shiny that it looked sticky enough to come off on the hands; black lace stockings, with a mesh almost as wide as that of her sweater; and white kid pumps fastened with three buttoned straps.

Lorna suppressed a groan. Something like that costume she saw fifty times a day, but not on members of her own family.

"Where are you staying?" she asked. "Just got in? Then come and have dinner with me, and we'll talk things over. Come home with me first, while I put on some warmer clothes—it's just around the corner."

"I suppose you think I've got nerve," Irene suggested, as they started off at a pace which Lorna, shivering a little, made rapid enough; "but I knew you knew everybody, and all I'll need is an introduction to Belasco."

"Ah!" said Lorna. "He's probably eating dinner now, so we can wait. By the way, let's get our relationship straightened out. I don't just place you."

"Why, that's easy. You remember your cousin Annie Murphy, from Harrisburg?"

"Annie Murphy! Why, of course! We used to play together when we were kids in pigtails. You don't mean to say you're Annie's daughter?"

Copyright, 1922, by Elmer Davis—This story began in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

"Well, in a way. You know she married a man named Lee, in Trenton; and then, when he died, she married Harry Laird. He was a widower, see? He was my father. My mother was dead before he married your cousin. They're all dead now, and I live with my Aunt Ida—that was mother's sister—and Uncle Jim—that's Aunt Ida's husband—over in Wynwood. Uncle Jim was—"

"Enough!" said Lorna. "It's some years since I climbed the family tree, and I'm not so limber as of old. If I get it right, we're some kind of kin. If I don't get it right, don't tell me; the night would be too short. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"And you want to go on the stage?"

"Yes, or I'd just as soon be in the movies. I thought you could tell me what I'd better do."

"I can," said Lorna grimly; "but later. Here's where I live."

They were at the foot of a flight of brownstone steps, beside which a protuberant glass front showed the sign:

MME. COSETTE MANDELBAUM
CLEANING AND DYEING

"Why, Cousin Lorna!" Irene gasped. "I thought you lived in a hotel!"

"I have, in times past; but just now I'm saving money. Cheer up—this place isn't as bad as it looks. It's just a plain theatrical rooming house. You'll get used to them when you're in the profession."

It was quite clear from Irene's manner that she was sure she would never sink to such a level. As they climbed the carpeted, dimly lit stairs, Lorna surmised that the girl from Wynwood was thinking—and thinking things that should be thought. Clearly, the revelation of Lorna's living conditions had been a shock; and a few more shocks, Lorna conjectured hopefully, might send her back to Wynwood on the nine o'clock train.

They went down the rambling corridor, where Irene stumbled against a huge white wardrobe that half blocked the passage; then Lorna threw open a door.

"Here we are, child. Yes, I know my luxury dazzles you; but remember that it's the reward of a long quarter of a century spent in the study and practice of the Thespian art!"

The irony of this went over Irene's head. She looked curiously about the room, while

Lorna changed quickly into warmer clothing, and evidently she found it more attractive than the home she had known.

Lorna, whose present fortunes would have enabled her to live in better style if she had wished, had replaced most of the lodging house furniture with something better. There was a narrow day bed with a dark embroidered cover; a soft armchair; a highboy, with a mirror half hidden by photographs; and a couch covered with a steamer rug. The rest of the room wasn't prepossessing. The solitary window looked out on a dark airshaft. A near-Japanese screen half concealed a stationary washstand. The deficiencies of the shallow closet were supplied by two wardrobe trunks, standing open, which scarcely left room to move about.

"Why, I think this is pretty nice," said Irene. "So Bohemian, and all!"

"I've lived in worse," Lorna admitted. "The bathroom is down the corridor. Anybody can use it, but few do. You'll want to change before dinner, I suppose?"

"Change?"

"Don't worry—we don't dress for dinner; but haven't you got another outfit?"

"I've got a suit in my bag, but I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought. Better put it on."

"But it isn't—"

"It doesn't have to be. Something simple and girlish will do."

"But won't this sport costume that I'm wearing—"

"Never mind, dear. Save that, in case you're presented to royalty."

Irene laid out fresh clothing, then looked doubtfully at Lorna.

"Do you think we could see Belasco to-night?"

Lorna sat down on the day bed and stared at her, frowning.

"Let's talk things over first," she suggested. "I want to get this straight. Does your uncle know you've come to see me?"

"Why, Cousin Lorna! Of course he knows. He and Aunt Ida both thought it would be fine."

"Where had you thought of staying?"

"Well, I've got fifty dollars, and I thought you could tell me some good hotel—"

"Just overnight," Lorna suggested, "you'd better camp here with me. I know it's not quite up to Buckingham Palace, but

the bed's comfortable, and I can put myself up on the couch. No use breaking into the fifty just yet. Been to school?"

"I've just finished high school."

"Graduate?"

"I should say I did—right up at the head of the class, too!"

"And I suppose you had a good part in the senior class play?"

"I did, till the coach took it away from me because I was showing her up. But how did you know?"

"Because twenty-five years ago I was a stage-struck high school girl myself. Yes, twenty-five years—count 'em—twenty-five. They're all there. See that picture?" Lorna waved a hand at a huge, softly shaded photograph of herself that dominated one end of the mirror. "That was taken last winter. You'd never believe it, but I really looked like that once."

"I believe it," said Irene, fumbling in her hand bag. "Do you remember this?"

It was a yellowed newspaper sheet, worn with much folding, but still showing clearly enough the photograph of a girl with a big pompadour and soulful eyes. Underneath was the legend:

Miss Lorna Lockwood, one of the beauties who adorn the chorus of the forthcoming big production, "Florodora."

"Mamma—I mean your cousin Annie—used to think a lot of that picture," said Irene artfully. "I always thought it was awfully beautiful, and you still look like it, Cousin Lorna. Mamma always said you'd do anything you could for me."

"She was right," Lorna announced decisively. "She was right. There's just one thing I can do for you, my child, and I'm going to do it right now. How old do I look? Never mind—you'd kid me; but I know. When you see me to-night, all dolled up, in 'So This Is Paris,' you'd say I was a mere girlish twenty-three. Even on the street, in broad daylight, I flatter myself I don't look much past thirty; but if you should go out to Gallipolis, Ohio, and undo the brass lock on the old family Bible, you'd find I'm forty-two. Twenty-five long years ago I left the church choir to its fate, and broke into the chorus; and you see what I've come to. No, I don't have to live here. I knock down a hundred a week in a piece that looks good for a long run; but I was a good fellow while I had it. I've lived in every hotel within a mile

of here, at one time or another; and sometimes I even attained class enough to flaunt a maid. Then, one day, I woke up from a nice little siege of typhoid pneumonia with my money gone, my voice gone—what there was to go—a hospital bill a mile long, and all my clothes gone out of style, while I'd been lying on my back picking at the counterpane.

"No, Lorna!" I said to myself, right then. 'Not again! Whatever you get from now on goes into the old sock. The time is drawing nigh when you won't be able to hide the passing of the years; when you'll be obviously middle-aged, too antique to be anybody's dream of girlish beauty, and too young to make up as the heartbroken mother.'

"That's why I've come back to live at Mother McCurdy's, and eat at lunch counters, and stick my pay into the savings bank. That's what I've come to; and how did I come to it? Did you ever go hungry? I don't mean miss a meal—did you ever miss three or four of them in a row, or five or six? Did you ever know that nothing but the hopeful charity of a landlady stood between you and the park bench? Did you ever walk the ties? Yes, I know that's a stale joke; but I've done it, and it's no joke when you swing into the fifteenth mile with a suit case in each hand. Far be it from me to discourage you, but Annie Murphy's second husband's uncle's stepdaughter shall never say she wasn't warned!"

"But not everybody has to do that, do they?"

"You were about to add, only the bum ones. Well, that's most of us. Ever do anything but this class play?"

"No, but everybody tells me—"

"Everybody told me that, too. Believe me, cousin dear, it takes work to learn how to wring a hundred-per-cent laugh out of a four-per-cent line."

"But I thought my looks—"

Lorna looked at her critically.

"Take off the sweater," she ordered. "And the skirt."

Rather doubtfully, Irene let them drop in a heap on the floor and stood off for Lorna's inspection.

"H-m!" Lorna mumbled. "The loss is partly covered by insurance."

"What say?"

"I say you've got a good figure. Can you dance?"

"I think I'm pretty good at it," Irene admitted.

"Now let's look once more. What's the matter with that eye?"

"It—it's glass," Irene sniffled despondently. "I fell on a stick when I was a kid; but I can see all right out of the other."

"It's not what you see," said Lorna more gently. "It's what other people see. In the pictures, that glass eye would take as big as a plate. Do you see what that means? The pictures are the best chance for a girl with nothing but looks; but they could never take you in a close-up. They might have a cast of seven thousand massed on the California mountains behind you, but the whole thing would be only setting, background, and atmosphere for that glass eye. You'd have to stick in the mob."

"I think you're mean!" Irene cried. "Rotten mean! You don't do anything but knock me. I know what's the matter with you—you're jealous!"

"There, now! Maybe I was a little bit rough; but Lord, how I wish somebody had been rough with me back in 1896! Put on your clothes, child. No, not those clothes—the others, whatever they may be. Now what would you have done if you'd stayed in—where is it—Wynwood?"

"I'd have died," Irene proclaimed. "Uncle Jim was going to make me wait on table in the lunch room."

"I've heard of worse," said Lorna. "Where there's a lunch room, there's always food. See here, kid! This is a thankless job of mine, but I want to tell you straight—this is the hardest, rottenest game in the world for anybody; and with your eye you haven't got a chance."

"What are you in it for, if it's the rottenest game in the world?"

"Because I don't know anything else, and I'm too old to learn."

"I'll show you!" said Irene fiercely. "We'll see if I haven't got a chance! Some day you'll be sorry you didn't help me when you could, instead of waiting till I was rich and famous."

Nevertheless, she began to dress, with a rather pathetic, fumbling slowness that touched Lorna. The operation had been necessary, but painful. It remained to be seen if it would succeed.

"Does your husband live here with you?" Irene asked.

"My husband?"

"I thought mamma said you were married once."

"She understated it. I was married twice. Yes, I know what you're thinking. If I only had some kind-hearted man to take care of me—Wish you could see what I picked! Oh, they both had their good points. My first husband, in fact, has done pretty well. I hear he's living happily with his second wife. He married a movie queen in Los Angeles. She makes a quarter of a million a year, and he spends it. He had a gift in that direction; I was never in his class at all. I divorced him, finally, but that was only his generosity. He could have got rid of me at any time, for non-support."

"But, Cousin Lorna, didn't he work?"

"Certainly not. I worked."

"But—you said there was another one."

"Oh, Al!" Lorna's face softened a little. "Al had his good points, too. He worked, all right. All the time I knew that man, he was constantly on the verge of making money; but we parted company in Chicago, and I divorced him. He was going to spend five years in Joliet, where I couldn't follow him."

"But why should he go to Joliet?"

"A little real estate transaction. He and some friends sold the Chicago Art Institute to a retired farmer from down State, who wanted a nice town house."

"Oh!" said Irene.

"Oh" is the word—the final comment. If you figure this game as an easy way to marry a millionaire—"

"I don't want to marry a millionaire," said Irene fiercely.

"Somebody back in Wynwood?" Lorna asked.

"How did you know?"

"There always is. He wanted to marry you when you got out of high school, and settle down in a nice bungalow, where he'd find you with supper on the table when he came home from the store; but you wouldn't. You wanted to come to New York and express your personality. Only you'd kind of like to do both."

"It isn't that way at all," said Irene. "In the first place, he's married already."

Lorna grunted.

"But he's miserable with his wife," Irene added. "He told me so himself. He leads a life of hateful routine, that—that bores him to death. Those was his very words."

"And he wants you to be his little sunshine, I suppose?"

"He does not! I might have known you wouldn't understand. He's not like other men—he's so honorable. He let me see how things were, but he didn't—he wouldn't—well, no words of what the world would call love have passed between us, but we know! Because I wouldn't break up his home, I went away; and he told me to go ahead and realize my ambitions and make him proud of me."

For a time there was silence, while Irene dabbed at her wet eyes with a rather dirty handkerchief.

"He's still in Wynwood?" Lorna asked, after some reflection. "He didn't follow you?"

"He would have if I'd said the word, but I wouldn't break up his home."

"Well, child, we'll see what we can do about getting you some sort of job. Anyway, you stay with me to-night. Old Mother McCurdy's not very lavish with bedclothes, but I'll browse around and find enough to keep us warm. I'll try to show you a good time, anyway. Come in and look over our show to-night; there have been worse. Afterward I'm going with a gang to the costume ball at the Palette Club. Like to come along? I can find you something to wear."

"Oh, Cousin Lorna! That would be great!"

"Then all is settled, and we can go out and eat."

"Maybe I'd better take a bath," Irene suggested, "if we're going to a costume ball."

"All right, if you'll make it a quick one. I'll find you some towels. Got a kimono?"

"Not with me. I—I didn't want to bring much baggage, so I left most of my things at home."

"Never mind. I'll give you something to wear down the corridor."

The clinging robe of rose silk that Lorna produced from one of the trunks had been a rather distinguished garment, in its day; and Lorna was startled at its success in bringing out the girl's somber beauty. In good clothes she could be made to look well.

Lorna sighed as she closed the bathroom door on her guest.

"Stranger things have happened," she muttered. "If it wasn't for that eye—Anyway, I've got to do something to take

her mind off the village *Don Juan*. Now, if I can find an extra blanket—"

She rummaged through the tall wardrobe in the corridor, the general receptacle for odds and ends too bulky to be retained in the little rooms. Presently from a heap of bedclothing she dragged out an old silk crazy quilt, ripped and tattered, with one side adorned by a broad medallion on which had been embroidered a full-rigged ship.

"Nice piece of wreckage!" she grunted. "I suppose somebody loved it once; and it looks warm. Hello—case for repairs!"

One side of the medallion had been ripped away, and a handful of the eider down stuffing was bulging out. Lorna carried the quilt into her room, found a needle and thread, and had taken a stitch or two, when the door bell buzzed behind her.

"Now who the dickens?"

She pushed the button that opened the street door, and waited while soft, hurried steps drew nearer through the dim corridors. He came in sight at last, hat in hand.

"Hello, Lorna! It's good to see you again!"

"Well!" said Lorna. "How did you get out of Joliet?"

VIII

"Oh, I'm through with Joliet," said Al cheerily. "Fourteen months knocked off for good behavior."

"And you heard I had a part in a new piece that looked good for a year's run, so you thought you'd come back to kiss and make up."

"Now, Lorna, you got me wrong."

His smile was ingratiating. Without waiting for an invitation, he walked in, laid his hat on the highboy, sat calmly down, and lit a cigarette. His blond hair was thinning over the temples, but otherwise the years had not changed him. His pale blue eyes still wandered uneasily, his hand still shook a little; but his attire was magnificent—a pale brown suit with a pin stripe of pale green, and ornamentations of slantwise pockets; a green-striped silk shirt; a pale green scarf knotted in a soft collar of striped silk.

Lorna regarded him with eyes in which an experienced skepticism was fighting a losing battle against a reluctant tolerance.

"You look prosperous," she observed.

"What have you sold now?"

"Oh, I'm through with all that," he re-

sponded absently, his eyes still roving about the room. "I went down to Tia Juana after I got out of Joliet, and had some luck."

"About time you made some money—honestly," she sniffed. "Why didn't you stay in Tia Juana?"

"Season's over. Besides, I got in wrong—beamed a Mexican cop, and had to beat it over the border."

"How did he come into your life?"

"Oh, they're darned interfering down there."

"Now that's strange, but I've heard they let you alone at Tia Juana, unless you pull something pretty rough. Same old Al, I guess!"

"Now, Lorna, you're one of these women that never give a man a chance to explain anything. But let it go; anyway, I'm back. This is a rotten-looking dump. Do you have to live here?"

"What if I do?"

"Because it ain't right. You're too good for it. I want to take you out of all this."

"Well, my word! Where could you take me, I'd like to know—not to mention how?"

"Oh, I'm in on a good thing," Al assured her. "Just putting through a little deal that will bring me in fifteen thousand on Monday."

"Old stuff, Al! You could buy the Pennsylvania Railroad with the money you almost made. What's the merry graft this time?"

"I can't tell you. It's a secret."

"I suppose it's so secret you couldn't even go down to headquarters and tell the commissioner about it, could you?"

"No, this is straight. Lorna, I'm off all that stuff. I found out there ain't nothing in it."

"Ha! A glimmer of intelligence at last! The trouble with you, Al, is that you haven't got brains enough to be a good con man, or nerve enough for a real crook; and you're too lazy to work. Outside of that you're all right. Now what about this fifteen thousand?"

"I'd tell you all about that in a minute, but it's another guy's game. I'm in honor bound. It's straight, Lorna—it ain't even bootlegging. I got a friend down in Havana. He's making a good thing out of a café, but he wants to spread out and do things right. I can buy a half interest, and then we'll all roll around on velvet."

"We? I though you knew I divorced you."

"Oh, I never held that against you, Lorna. Say, kid, Havana would be dead without you."

For a moment she gazed at him in unwilling admiration.

"Al, you're a wonder! If I didn't know you, I'd believe it."

He smiled tolerantly.

"We got a bad start, Lorna, and I don't say it wasn't as much my fault as yours; but I learned a lot there in Joliet. There's lots of good guys in jail, when you get to know 'em. I see now there's nothing in the con game. What you want, when you get to my age, is a little bunch of coin and a good woman, and then you can settle down and be happy. You're the woman, and I get the coin Monday. What do you say, Lorna?"

"I'll say no," she declared. "Just at present, Al, I have light and genteel employment, fairly well remunerated. Do you think I'd leave it to follow your rainbow fortunes?"

"You think I'm just the same, don't you? Give me a chance! What do you say—let's run down to Atlantic City tomorrow, and we can come back in time for the holiday *matinée* Monday. Give us time to talk things over."

"Can't do it. I've got a kid cousin from Jersey staying with me. She wants to be a movie queen, and I've got to get her discouraged, and ship her back home, before I begin to think about week-ends. Besides, we're not married."

"Married for once, married for good—that's the way I look at it. Maybe you think it's funny, Lorna, but my folks were good church people, and some of the ideas they put in my head used to come back to me there in Joliet. Whatever the law says, Lorna, I don't feel divorced a little bit."

"Well, I do—quite a lot. Also and moreover, my friend, I divorced you for desertion, but there were a dozen or so other grounds that I didn't mention, not wishing to be verbose."

"Now, Lorna! If you mean girls, I'm off that stuff. Honest, I'll never look at another woman again. We ain't as young as we once was, Lorna, and I thought it would be kind of nice to settle down and live quietly—with you."

"Oh, Al! There's something about you that gets me. If I'd never been married

to you, all this would get over, but—the kid'll be in in a minute, and we're going out to get something to eat. I'll test your pretensions of prosperity by letting you buy us a dinner at the Claridge."

"Can't do it—I got to see a fellow at seven. How about after the show? I got to see another fellow at twelve, but we might go some place and get some supper first."

"No, the kid and I are going out—the Palette masquerade. Oh, don't worry—we're going with a gang, heavily married. If I should turn you down, Al, it wouldn't be on account of competition."

"You send the kid along with this heavy gang," said Al, "and then you and I can sit down and talk this thing over. Honest, Lorna, I'm crazy about you!"

"You're crazy—I'm with you that far. Here's the kid."

The door opened before Irene, her kimono fluttering loosely, and a towel draped over one arm. As she saw Al, she gave a little scream of girlish modesty, and hastily drew her kimono about her, so that its draperies outlined every curve of her figure. The demands of innocence having been thus satisfied, she held her pose on the threshold, and stared open-eyed at this first glimpse of the untrammelled Bohemianism of the stage.

"Oh, come on in, child," said Lorna. "This is only one of my exes I was telling you about. Al, my little cousin, Irene."

"Our little cousin, eh? Well, child, I didn't mean to intrude on an intimate scene, but now that I'm here I hate to go. Got to do it, but I hope we'll get to be good friends before long. How about it, Lorna? Do I see you to-night?"

"Only from out in front," she said grimly.

She knew his altered manner—the manner that he had always assumed, instinctively, at sight of a new girl. It was the same old Al.

During Al's farewell, Irene strove to maintain the hauteur of aristocracy surprised in the bath; but when the door had closed she threw out her arms and sighed:

"Oh, Cousin Lorna! I think he's simply superb. Have you and he become reconciled?"

"Not yet."

"I was so embarrassed, having him see me this way—"

"Well, he wasn't embarrassed, so don't

worry. Now get your clothes on, and we'll eat."

"I don't see how you can eat," said Irene, "when romantic things like this are happening."

"Maybe it's strange, but my appetite remains unaffected. Now hurry!"

IX

AL made his way gingerly down the dim stairway, and halted at the street door. He studied it carefully in the flickering light of the gas jet. It was fastened by a spring lock.

Lorna had been harsh with him, but he had rather expected that. If only he could get time to reason with her! He had always had a taking way, he flattered himself, with the fair sex.

Revolving these thoughts in the fluttering light, a phrase from the Sunday school days of boyhood returned to him—"while the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return." Peering cautiously upstairs, to make sure that he was unobserved, he took the catch off the spring lock.

"If she finds me waiting for her after the show," he reflected, "she'll send the kid along, and we can talk it out. Lorna's a good guy—and that hundred a week might look good, if anything went wrong to-night!"

Admiration for his strategy, returning confidence in his power to charm the ladies, made him strut a little as he went down the long flight of steps outside. He even whistled under his breath. That strut, imperceptible to an unobservant man, and that whistle, which a careless man would not have heard, attracted the attention of a large person with puffy jaws who happened to be passing.

As Al turned off toward Broadway, the large one looked him over, and then, with a surprising rapidity of movement, caught up with him and laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Hello, Keeley! In our midst once more?"

Al turned about, his teeth chattering.

"I swear I've done nothing, Donovan—not a thing!"

"That's fine! The old burg may have been dried up, but she's still a little livelier than Joliet, eh? Live in this house?"

"No."

"Where do you live?"

"Now, look here. What right—"

"Oh, lay off that stuff!"

"I live at the Grantland."

"By yourself?"

"Yes."

"All right! What's the game?"

"Look here, Donovan, I tell you I ain't done a thing. For the love of Pete lay off of me! All I want is a chance to go straight."

"That's all you'll get," said Donovan. "Ta-ta, Al! Remember, old friends follow your career with interest."

Al watched, motionless; and not till he was sure that Donovan was really gone did he turn cautiously, and, with much looking backward over his shoulder, make his way to Sixth Avenue. And then he walked uptown for two or three blocks, and into a cross street once more. Just around the corner was a little bakery lunch room, in the basement. Al went down the steps and entered, nodding to the cashier.

He knew this place of old. Before prohibition it had been a saloon, patronized chiefly by gamblers, gunmen, and gentlemen of less honorable callings. Prohibition had driven the old proprietor into retirement, and he had been succeeded by a person from Rivington Street, who served new fare to the old crowd. Gamblers and gunmen still met here, and paid their checks to the same old cashier; but now they drank coffee and ate cake, and their intellects, unclouded by liquor, were left free to think up ingenious enterprises, such as would have been forgotten, in the old days, by the fourth round of high balls.

Back in the corner, scowling at a cup of coffee and a piece of pastry that reposed untouched on the table before him, was the man Al was looking for. He was grim and unshaven. He wore a gray cap, a gray flannel shirt, and a baggy serge suit; and he was known as Dirty Dan.

Eight or ten years ago Al had been rather ashamed of his acquaintance with this person. At the period of the Lawrence strike and the Colorado mine war, no gathering of the unemployed in Union Square, no street corner meeting of the I. W. W., had been complete without a few passionate remarks from Dirty Dan. Al had always felt that Dan was hardly respectable; but it had been an unexpected pleasure to meet him at Joliet, just as Al was beginning to feel homesick among so many unknown faces; and when a warden who had faith in human nature made them

both trusties, old acquaintance was pleasantly renewed.

The warden's confidence was justified, no doubt; for by that time both prisoners had an ambition for better things. Al had begun to realize that there were men who made as much profit, and with no more moral obliquity, in selling what they actually owned as he had ever made out of the disposal of the title to courthouses and town halls.

Dan, too, aspired to respectability. If he could only get to Russia, he told Al, he could be made a chief of police somewhere. Some of his old friends in the I. W. W. had actually done it. The yearning for moral reform had drawn them together at Joliet, and when they had met in New York, two days before, they had speedily discovered that each had connections which would be useful to the other.

Al eased himself into the chair beside Dan, who looked up and grunted.

"Careful!" said Al. "Donovan picked me up down the street."

"The devil! Has he got anything on you?"

"Guess not. He didn't trail me. Did your sailor come across?"

"Sure he come across," said Dan, with a trace of a grin. "He come across, and right now he's fillin' himself up with prohibition hooch down on West Street. When he wakes up to-morrow morning, he'll be outward bound, and he'll never know what hit him. Boy, I got friends in this town!"

"So have I," said Al proudly.

"Yes—Donovan, I s'pose!"

"And Fingerstone. You and your little job would be in a fine fix if I didn't know Fingerstone."

"Maybe we would; but remember—I've done my part. If you and Fingerstone lay down on me—boy, there's men under the sod to-day that would still be walkin' the streets if it hadn't been for Dirty Dan!"

Al didn't like this turn of the conversation. He had always been a man of peace.

"Let's go up to your room," he suggested. "You can slip me the stuff there. I can't take you home with me. Maybe Donovan—"

"Then we don't go to my dump, if you think Donovan knows anything. This job is none of his business, of course; but wouldn't he like to slip one over on the Department of Justice, eh? Here—Slimmy will let us have the back room for a

minute; I guess the old way out into Sixth Avenue is still working."

After a whispered conference with the cashier, they edged furtively into a back room, furnished only with a round table and some plain wooden chairs. Dan locked the door, and saw that the back door leading out into a dark passage was ready at his hand. Then he laid his cap down on the table, and from an envelope that had been hidden in an inside pocket he poured into it a sparkling stream of diamonds. They rolled out and over each other with a little tinkle, scintillating in the light of the unshaded electric bulb.

"Thirty-two of 'em," said Dan proudly; "and not half a dozen under a carat. Good thing that Swede sailorman was a good honest Red. He could have bought his way into the nobility with these babies!"

"Sure they didn't send somebody to trail him from Russia?"

"Hell, no! They knew him. He'd worked for their Extraordinary Commission; but this afternoon he was seen blind drunk on the water front. Plenty of people saw him—I took care of that. When the sad news reaches Russia, they'll think he fell for hard liquor and somebody stuck him up. He'll be off on the high seas, where he can't talk back; and there'll be no evidence that the pretty babies ever got to Dan."

Al's throat contracted curiously as he looked at the diamonds.

"Dan," he whispered, "I'm almost afraid of 'em. How about the people they were coming to? They'll be ready to raise a row."

Dan chuckled in high contempt.

"Sure! I suppose they'll go right down and tell the Secret Service that they've mislaid a shipment of diamonds from Russia, sent over to keep the home fires burning till the big day. Probably ask the post office to see that they ain't sent back to the return address on the envelope—'Nick Lenin, Moscow.' You're a great thinker, you are!"

Al reddened.

"Don't be a boob. They may try to bump us off."

"Huh! Boy, they know me. The fellows that were to get these babies write a lot about blood, but none of 'em ever saw it. I have. Oh, they'll tear their hair, and cuss, and call me a traitor because I decided to get mine now instead of waitin'

for the revolution; but they'll lay off of Dan. They know me. Them and their revolution! Take it from Dan, that revolution will be a long time comin'. You and I'll take ours this week!"

Al was still fascinated by the glittering heap.

"They're worth a lot of money," he whispered.

"Sure they are! Look at these two. They must be a good four carats each. Too big—too hard to get away with."

"Leave that to Fingerstone. He can get away with anything."

"You say so," Dan grunted. "I've got to take your word for it; but if you and Fingerstone cross me, somebody will get croaked."

"We won't cross you. What do you think we're in this for?"

"If he turned these things in at the right place," said Dan, "he'd get a nice little reward. Yes, I know you've got something on him; but he might figure it was safer to square himself by doin' that, instead of splittin' with us. These fences are a bad lot, most of 'em; they ain't honest. I want to tell you now that if either you or Fingerstone holds out on me, somebody will be found in the morgue!"

"Nobody's goin' to cross you, Dan."

"I didn't think you'd have the nerve," Dan admitted amiably; "but I just wanted to tell you. That goes for Fingerstone, too. When do you meet him?"

"Twelve."

"Does he come across?"

"You don't know Fingerstone. He's a cagey bird—got to be sure the stuff is all right. We get ours Monday night. Oh, don't worry—you could turn him around your finger with a little gunplay."

"Well, remember, if he tries anything, he'll get his. Now where do you go from here?"

"Thought I'd stroll around—maybe see an act or two of a show."

"We can't stick together, but I don't want you fallin' over Donovan's feet again."

"I won't. I've got a date a little later in the evening."

"You haven't got time to fool with a woman now, Al, if you're goin' over to see Fingerstone."

"I'll get away for that. Don't you worry, Dan."

"I never worry," said Dan. "Life's too short; but I make other people worry, if

anything goes wrong. Don't think you need to slip this woman one of the rocks!"

"I won't," Al promised. "I told you I was going straight after this job; and she goes with me."

"Who is it? Have you told her?"

"It's my wife; but I haven't told her."

"Your wife? You never told me you had a wife."

"I haven't got her; but I'll have her when Fingerstone comes through. Don't worry, Dan—I need that fifteen thousand worse than you do."

"Well," said Dan cheerfully, "you better not begin to think you need my fifteen thousand. If you slip the rocks to your wife, you'll be found toes up on the pavement. Think that over, Al!"

X

At seven o'clock Blish and O'Rell emerged from the Critics' Club, richer by some seventy dollars than they had entered the place.

"I tell you, Marky, that goddess of fortune is certainly good to us to-night. Got on her best dinner gown and bending all her smiles on us. Is this our evening? I'll say so!"

O'Rell strode beside him in austere silence. It was a big evening—an occasion too majestic to be profaned by idle chatter. His lost youth had come back. He had forgotten how much pleasure could be derived from felonious and illicit profit brought in by the rolling ivories. That he was a competent and respectable high school principal, earning his thirty-five hundred a year, and deserving of a raise, was something to be taken for granted; but that he could coax money out of the dice was something to be proud of.

He knew well enough that Blish was looking him over rather anxiously, and wondering why two or three drinks should affect him so. As a matter of fact, they hadn't affected him at all. O'Rell was intoxicated by the sudden and triumphant reappearance of his submerged personality; by discovering that he could still enjoy an aggressively masculine gathering, and that he could win respectable sums of money at a sport which high school principals should know only to abhor.

He hadn't felt so well satisfied with himself since he had met Aunt Cordelia. Life was good; Blish was a good fellow; and they were going to a dinner of the best fel-

lows in the world. Somewhere the skies were clouded; somewhere grubby persons starved their souls and prisoned their personalities within the walls of Wynwoods; but for those persons Mark O'Rell had only a charitable contempt.

The principal of the Wynwood High School had been transformed by kindly magic into a gentleman of Broadway. And it was as a gentleman of Broadway that he greeted Johnny Zane at Dondin's—Zane, absorbed in the cares pertaining to the chairman of the dinner committee, but still able to spare a moment for old friends.

"Well, old Mark! You're looking fine. Your wife must be a wonder."

"She's all of that."

"Lucky rascal! Haven't seen you look so well in years. If Jersey does that for you, guess I'll have to move across the river. See you later—and, say! Get the quartet together as quick as you can. We want you to start in as soon as everybody is seated. Wherever they used to take a drink, give 'em a song."

"We'll do that," O'Rell promised.

He sauntered into the reception room feeling very much like a god come down from Olympus. He looked rather Olympian, for that matter, with a gracious content shining from his handsome face. It fed his sense of well-being, too, to find that men whom he hadn't seen for years welcomed him so whole-heartedly.

"Well, Marky! How's everything? Come down and lunch with me; want to chin over the good old days."

"Why, here's old Mark O'Rell. You've got to come home with me to-night. What? Can't do it? You live in Jersey? Oh! Well, well, well! Thought you were killed in the war. Glory, you're looking fine!"

And after he had passed:

"Looks like all of a million dollars, doesn't he?"

It came to Mark that to-night, for the first time in a year, he had found people who were really glad to see him—for himself. Marjorie was glad to see him, of course. Marjorie's family always professed to be glad to see Marjorie's husband; but these people were glad to see Mark O'Rell. It contributed to the aggrandizement of his ego to be able to walk about among men who regarded him as a welcome guest, when he was used to a rather apologetic entrance into the houses of Marjorie's relatives and Marjorie's friends, where any-

body else whom Marjorie might have married would have been received as readily.

In this mood he came upon Hinton K. Atlee, who had withdrawn to a remote sofa, and was furtively glancing over a little card covered with jotted notes, which he hastily thrust back into an inner pocket as O'Rell greeted him.

The incident touched O'Rell. It added the sympathetic proof of human frailty to a personage of whom he had hitherto stood in some awe; so he greeted Atlee with an affable ease that he had never been able to muster in Wynwood.

In Wynwood it would have been unbecoming for the high school principal to display a shade of condescension to the man by whose favor he held his job; but it was natural enough for a gentleman of Broadway, whom everybody was glad to meet, to display a shade of condescension to an unhappy suburbanite trying to memorize old jokes for use in his forthcoming speech. And because Atlee was not used to making speeches, because he was a little alarmed and a little lonely, and glad to see a face from home, he responded with a paternal joviality that he had never displayed in Wynwood.

"So here you are, my boy! They told me to look for you. Well, well—it's good to see you. We Wynwoodites will have to stick together among these city chaps, won't we? Ah, I tell you it's a great thing for us old fellows to get in touch with you youngsters now and then. Freshens us up. What's that? No, they put me down toward the end of the program. I suppose they wanted to make sure that I'd be brief and to the point, and they knew a commuter would be bound to stop in time to catch his train. See you on the twelve ten, I suppose."

O'Rell's evening, so well begun, was all but ruined by that single phrase. The twelve ten! There was no escape; the gates of pleasure would soon be shut. He wasn't a gentleman of Broadway; he was a much married suburban school-teacher, enjoying the unique and somewhat questionable experience of a night off.

No matter how he might try to bury himself in the past, he couldn't get away from Wynwood. Those stolen hours of pleasure at the theater and the club took on enhanced value, as he realized that the good times would so soon be ended. To-morrow he would have to tell Marjorie all about it.

Perhaps, if luck turned against him, he might even have to tell Aunt Cordelia all about it; for she would be on hand early to recover the quilt.

And then Blish came up and took his elbow.

"Sorry to tear you away, Marky, but Hamill and Garrison are out in the cloak room. We'd better go and tune up."

"It's a short life," said O'Rell dolefully, as they marched away; "but I'm going to do my darnedest to make it merry while it lasts!"

Half an hour after the time set on the program, the dinner committee at last managed to herd the crowd in toward the dining room. In fifteen minutes more they had got it seated, though without exception the men who had given up an evening of leisure and six dollars for this dinner allowed themselves to be led to it with the air of going in purely as a personal favor to the committee.

The aristocracy whose names appeared on the program filed along the communication trench behind the speakers' table. A bald-headed gentleman, whose dress suit and mustache were both of the style of 1897, when they had been new and decorative, tapped his water glass with a knife.

Amid a clatter of chairs pushed out and pulled back, an obscure citizen in clerical attire pronounced an inaudible invocation. The diners sat down and contemplated their cards with poorly concealed dissatisfaction; and the chairman arose and cleared his throat just as a raiding party of waiters burst in with plates of clams.

"Brothers in Phi Sigma Upsilon!" (Applause.) "At this our first reassembling since the war, I am sure we are all conscious of the great changes which have occurred since our last meeting. We all mourn the loss of some of our best-beloved brothers, dead on the field of honor. We all rejoice in the glory that has been shed upon our order by modest men whom we have long known as friends and brothers, and whom we now hail as heroes." (Applause.) "And most of us, no doubt, are still a little dazed—a little sore, if I may so express myself—at the disappearance of those sparkling beverages" (great applause) "which in time past offered such prompt and potent aid to the dissemination of fraternal comity." (Cries of "Hear, hear!")

"The dinner committee, to whose un-

selfish labors we owe so much" (scattering applause) "is of course unable to supply that deficiency." (Groans.) "But they have done the next best thing." (Startled and hopeful silence.) "We all remember the old quartet" (a sigh of disillusion) "whose melodious voices did so much to liven things up at our gatherings of yore. They are with us again to-night, and"—the chairman felt pretty sure that Zane had been too busy to deliver this line to more than a few, so that he could safely steal it—"perhaps, if they give us a song wherever we used to have a drink, we may be able to drown our sorrows in admiration for their talents. Gentlemen, the quartet!"

They filed in hastily, Blish in the lead.

"We'll have to ask you to be easy on us," he apologized. "We haven't been together in some years, and we don't know anything new; but if you can stand a few old favorites—all ready, boys!"

The four voices rose suddenly:

"Roses, roses, roses bring memories of you, dear—"

When the dutiful applause had been dutifully acknowledged by an encore, the four withdrew to the cloak room.

"Pretty rotten," said Hamill. "We're not getting over."

"Joy has fled," Blish agreed. "Little Byron is going away from here as soon as he can. How about the Palette, Marky?"

"Lord, I wish I could!"

"Why not call up the wife and tell her you're coming down with me overnight? June's a good sport—she'll love to see you at breakfast. We could play around for an hour or two at the Palette, and go down with the morning papers."

O'Rell shook his head stubbornly.

"I've got to listen to my employer's speech. Let's go in and try the soup."

With the fish course the quartet delivered "When I Wore a Tulip, a Big Yellow Tulip, and You Wore a Red, Red Rose." The applause was conscientious, but not unrestrained.

"The old stuff doesn't go," said the gloomy Hamill, when they had again retired to the cloak room. "We're too damned horticultural, anyway—two rose songs in a row. Don't we know anything else?"

"Picture to-night a brewery painted white," Blish caroled. "Hear those Dutchmen sing hi-lee hi-lo!"

"Shut up!" said Garrison. "Don't desecrate the grave. I predict that this is the last dinner. Brotherhood can be worn too thin."

"How about ducking the speeches and going over to that masquerade?" Blish proposed again. "Marky thinks he can't go with me, but you fellows can make it. Beautiful artists' models in dashing and seductive costume—the mystery of the domino—how about it?"

"Not for me," said Hamill. "I've got to take the kids to the Bronx Zoo in the morning. Early to bed and early to rise!"

"I'll stick one speech," said Garrison, "and then home to Harlem."

O'Rell glared at them scornfully.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" he demanded. "I have an alibi—two or three alibis—for turning down this proposal of Byron's; but you don't live in the suburbs. Why can't you cut loose and amuse yourselves?"

Hamill shook his head.

"The late *Rip Van Winkle*," he observed, "just back from the Catskills. Mark, old topper, times have changed!"

With difficulty, the quartet found selections for two more courses, delivered to an audience whose enthusiasm was rapidly sliding down toward the zero mark. Then the work of the songsters was over, coffee and ice cream appeared on the tables, and the victims lit their cigars and prepared to settle down for the oratory.

By that time O'Rell's evening had been pretty well ruined. He was contemplating a misdeed universe; intelligent men gathering at considerable expense to hear one another make speeches; good fellows like Hamill and Garrison, who once had been ready to accept any and all proposals for an evening's revelry, deadened by the necessity of taking the children to the Zoo to-morrow morning; the wealthy and respected Hinton K. Atlee reduced to pitiable panic at the prospect of having to deliver some remarks which few would hear and none would remember; and, most pathetic of all, a gentleman of Broadway who would disappear like *Cinderella* on the stroke of midnight, and would be transformed into a suburban school-teacher by the time he caught the twelve ten.

Why had he selected this doleful gathering of ghosts, this futile effort to resuscitate dead associations, for his one night off? Why hadn't he come to town long ago, to

amuse himself with the infinite diversions in which Blish passed his days and nights? Somewhere not far away the masked dancers were already gathering. There would be beautiful women, and women who would pass as beautiful so long as they were masked. That was life!

The speeches would have been long enough, at best, but Blish, who sat down beside O'Rell, made them seem a good deal longer by continually looking at his watch. O'Rell wanted to knock over a chair, to break a water bottle—anything to relieve his nervous tension. And when at last Hinton K. Atlee sat down, at eighteen minutes past eleven, having delivered a speech not so good as he had intended, but not so bad as the somnolent audience had feared, O'Rell slipped out with Blish under cover of the applause, and retired once more to the cloak room.

The cloak room, they discovered, had already become the refuge of those whose distaste for oratory was most violent. It was almost as crowded as the dining room, and a good deal more jovial. Parties of old friends had gathered among the overcoats to retell old stories, and there was a genial good fellowship, an eager readiness to laugh at anything that might conceivably be intended as a joke, which provided a pleasing contrast with the dull boredom of the dining room.

Perhaps the fact that three or four flasks were going the rounds had something to do with this. At any rate, the spirit of brotherhood seemed to have come to a furtive blossoming in the cloak room when it had long ago died of early frost at the banquet.

O'Rell said something of the sort to Blish, who signified his agreement.

"Right you are, Marky; but who cares about brotherhood, anyway? How about the sisterhood? You can steal an hour from the fireside, old kid. Take another train; mingle with the merry merry; masquerade with models; kick your heels for maybe the last time. Now, Marky, think it over. Come along to the Palette with me, and then we'll introduce you to June across the breakfast table."

"Byron, my boy, you don't realize what you're asking me. I—I'm in a peculiar position."

"Not peculiar at all," Blish explained to the congregation of the cloak room. "Nothing peculiar about it. He's married a wife."

"Married a wife?" said O'Rell bitterly. "Byron, if that was all, I wouldn't mind it. The trouble is I married a family—a town—a country club—a philosophy of life—the whole damn State of New Jersey!"

"Well, now don't be hasty about this, Marky. Look here—come along for just an hour, and catch your train later."

"That train leaves in forty minutes—and I've got to get the quilt."

"Well, that train ain't the last one to-night, is it?"

"There's the one thirty-five," said O'Rell, more from the habit of the commuter who makes it a point of honor to know his time table than because he had any intentions connected with the one thirty-five.

"What's the matter with the one thirty-five? You can sleep to-morrow."

If the dinner had been like the dinners of old, Mark would never have listened to the tempter; but the dinner had pretty well erased the satisfaction born of the afternoon's pastime and the fortunate game at the club. He didn't want to go home with the memories of that dinner upon him. An hour at the masquerade would give him something cheerful to remember when he went back to teaching school.

Now that he thought it over, it was perfectly simple. Going home with Blish, of course, was not to be thought of; but he could spend an hour at the dance, catch the one thirty-five, and tell Hinton K. Atlee, when he next saw him, that he had missed the twelve ten because he was absorbed in talking over old times with old friends.

But Marjorie expected him on the twelve ten. Well, a good alibi ought to stand being used twice. He could tell the same story to Marjorie. Even in his present reckless mood he realized that Marjorie might be harder to convince than Hinton K. Atlee, but he would take a chance.

The mere decision to take a chance raised O'Rell considerably in his own self-esteem. Ever since he had acquired a wife, a school, and two mortgages, he hadn't thought of taking a chance on anything; but this evening he had rolled the bones, and with amazing fortune. It seemed to be his lucky day, and he was willing to crowd his luck.

With a pleased surprise Mark was beginning to realize that his old self wasn't dead; and it was a fascinating, though a dangerous, speculation to wonder what would

happen if he dared show his old self to Wynwood.

"Byron, you're a Napoleon," he declared. "I'm with you for an hour—only I've got to telephone my wife first."

"Now, Marky, if you forget your promise at her siren call—"

"I won't," said O'Rell, with something like his old resolution.

"That's fine! Remember our motto, old kid—both for one and one for both. If you need any help in establishing an alibi, call for Byron. We'll knock those masqueraders dead!"

Just outside the cloak room was a coin-box phone—open to the hearing of any one who might pass by, but O'Rell cared nothing for that. Blish was hanging anxiously on his elbow, but the cloak room merry-makers were out of hearing; and he didn't mind Blish. It was comforting to feel that he had this support.

Mark took off the receiver and called his own number. Then he remembered that in all probability Marjorie was still at Zella's. The bridge party wouldn't break up till after midnight—Zella's parties never did. Marjorie would get home just in time to make him some sandwiches before he got in from the twelve ten. He recalled the operator, with considerable difficulty, and substituted Zella's number for his own.

And then his conscience began to jab him with sharp spiked instruments. Zella's telephone was in the living room. They would have to stop the bridge game—perhaps shut off the phonograph—while Marjorie talked to him. They would all know that he was making excuses to stay away from his wife; and the shock that his message would bring to Marjorie would be heightened by the shame of this disclosure to a crowd.

But would it be such a shock, after all? It shouldn't be. There was nothing particularly felonious about coming home an hour and a half later than he had promised; and his excuse was as good as if it were true—indeed, somewhat better. Nobody could reasonably take offense at an hour's talk with old friends. He felt sure that Marjorie wouldn't mind sitting up an hour or so longer—she never needed much sleep.

But Mark knew that all this was aside from the point. Marjorie shouldn't mind, but she would mind. She was his wife, and he loved her. Unreasonable though she

might be, he wouldn't hurt her feelings, and her pride. He couldn't!

With the receiver still in his hand, he turned away from the telephone.

"Byron, I can't do it. Marjorie wouldn't understand."

"Now, kid, don't weaken. What's a little racket to-morrow beside an evening of merriment?"

"It isn't that," said O'Rell. "She may not say anything about it, but she'll think about it. She won't like it. Oh, I know that's foolishness, but Marjorie can't help the way she's been raised. She's a good little girl, and I'm damned if I'm going to hurt her!"

Behind him a voice came faintly through the buzzing of the wire, and he whirled about with—

"Hello! Is this Zella?"

"Hello!"

"Hello! Is this Mrs. Burbidge?"

"No, sir."

"Some bonehead maid, I suppose," he muttered. "Hello! I want to speak to Mrs. O'Rell."

The wire was buzzing abominably, but he heard the answer clearly enough.

"Mrs. O'Rell is not here, sir."

Not there! Zella's parties never broke up at this early hour. Something must have happened.

"Where is she?"

"Hello!"

"I say, where is Mrs. O'Rell? Where is—oh, damn! I want to speak to Mrs. Burbidge."

"Mrs. Burbidge is out, sir. This is the maid speaking."

"Yes," said O'Rell, "I gathered that much; but where is Mrs. Burbidge, and, above all, where is Mrs. O'Rell?"

"They're all out, sir—Mr. and Mrs. Burbidge and their guests."

"Out? Where are they?"

"They've gone out to the camp, sir—out to the lake."

"Out to the lake?" O'Rell repeated. "Good God, Byron, that's twenty miles back in the hills! Hello! You say they've all gone out to the lake? When are they coming back?"

"I don't know, sir. They all took overnight bags."

"And Mrs. O'Rell went too?"

"Yes, sir. Will you leave your name and number?"

As O'Rell slammed the receiver back on

the hook, he heard Byron Blish exploding in a joyous whoop behind him:

"And Mrs. O'Rell went too! Boy, page Mrs. O'Rell!"

"Shut up!" Mark growled.

"Oh, boy! So that's the blushing bride who waits with the lamp in the window, and weeps if her Marky misses the midnight train. Twenty miles back in the hills!"

"No reason why she shouldn't," said O'Rell more calmly. "The Burbidges often take week-end parties out in the summer. I've gone myself. Everybody in that crowd lives within a few blocks. They could get their clothes and get back to Zella's in ten minutes. Marjorie's only gone with her gang."

"Exactly, my boy—exactly! She's gone with her gang, and she won't be home till to-morrow. Marky, when you've been married as long as I have, it may occur to you that you're not the only one that needs a night off now and then. Gone with her gang! Why not? And now, Marky, do you go with your gang?"

"My gang?"

"I'm your gang, Marky. Do we go and peer at the lovely faces behind that mystic domino? Do you come down home and spend the night with me? Do you meet June at breakfast, and do all three of us go for a swim before you start back to Jersey, to reproach your wife for letting you come home to an empty house? Do we go, Marky? Do we go?"

"We go," said O'Rell. "There's only one thing still on my mind. Before we turn up at this dance you speak of, I'll have to stop off and get that quilt."

"I suppose the only way to make you stop talking about it is to let you get it. Well, if you must, we'll slide right around to Forty-Fifth Street, and then on with the dance."

Byron plunged back into the cloak room and pushed aside a group of merry tale-tellers, to recover his hat and O'Rell's.

"What's your hurry?" one of them called to him. "Stop off and hear this one."

"Can't do it," Blish called cheerily over his shoulder. "Marky and I are off to revel with the wild women!"

At twenty-eight minutes after eleven the last speaker on the program sat down, but the toastmaster was convinced that it would never do to let a dinner break up at

that early hour. Straggling commuters had already left, and desertions to the cloak room had left many empty chairs; but more than half of the diners sat grimly at the tables, determined to see it through. The toastmaster conferred with the man on his right and the man on his left, and with Johnny Zane, and then tapped once more on his glass.

"As you will see by the program, Brother Terwilliger's address is the valedictory; but I am sure that none of us wish to leave without hearing a few informal remarks from some of our younger members, and particularly from those who served their country with such distinction in Flanders fields. There is one among our number whom we all knew and loved in the old days, who has added the laurels of the battlefield to the garlands which friendship had already woven for his brow. A loyal brother in Phi Sigma Upsilon, a regular attendant at these gatherings, a man who was never so happy as in the midst of friends who prized the sterling worth of his character, even while unaware of the gallantry which he was to display in freedom's cause."

He paused for a swallow of water, with the conviction that he had done pretty well, considering that he had never heard of the person whom he was introducing till two minutes ago.

"Brothers in Phi Sigma Upsilon, I call upon Brother Mark O'Rell—or, as he is better known, Captain O'Rell, D. S. C."

Prompted by the members of the dinner committee, the waterlogged brothers staggered heavily to their feet and sang in dolorous measures that he was a jolly good fellow. Some of the more gallant spirits even waved their napkins.

Duty done, they sat down. There was a silence.

"Is Brother O'Rell in the house?" asked the toastmaster.

"Brother O'Rell commutes," said a voice from the floor. "I think he's gone to catch his train."

In the laughter that followed this remark, Hinton K. Atlee looked hastily at his watch, and put it away with a reassurance tempered by misgiving.

"His train doesn't leave for half an hour," he muttered to the man beside him. "He must have been afraid he'd miss it."

"More likely afraid he won't miss it," said his neighbor. "I saw him out with

the cloak room gang a while ago, and some of the brothers had brought in quite a lot on the hip."

"You don't say so! You surprise me. I had thought he was most abstemious. If—if you think he needs a friendly word—"

"Too late for that. I saw him putting on his hat and going out with Byron Blish. They were saying something about wild women."

Atlee shook his head.

"Amazing! I should never have suspected it. Out in Wynwood we have always regarded him as a most exemplary young man. I must make inquiries—yes, indeed I must!"

XI

HALF past ten found Al loitering on the sidewalk, across the street from Mother McCurdy's. He would have to be going in before long, for he intended to be there, waiting, when Lorna came back from the theater. If he could only talk to her she would be reasonable; women were almost always reasonable after Al had talked to them for a while. And it wasn't right for Lorna to be living in a cheap dump like this, he reasoned—a woman who had played leads.

Lorna was by no means the only one of Mother McCurdy's tenants who had seen better days; and there was always a scattering of young people, somewhere in those four stories of dingy brownstone, who were going to see better days in future. About the only sort of actors, actresses, newspaper men, playwrights, press agents, and other members of the parasitic classes who didn't live there were those who were seeing better days now.

Al had memories of Mother McCurdy's himself. He had been there on the famous occasion when an elderly gentleman who had turned on the gas after three days with nothing to eat—though, of course, Mother McCurdy didn't know that till later—turned out to be a tenor who had been the Caruso of his day. He still had a speaking acquaintance with the girl who had left a rickety trunk containing a pair of old shoes and fourteen copies of the *Billboard* in lieu of four months' room rent, and who, though she was now making her hundred thousand a year in the pictures, had never made an effort to pay anything more on the account. He had been one of the guests on that great day when Mother Mc-

Curdy got her divorce and bought champagne for the house.

Nevertheless, it was no sort of place for the wife of a man who was about to turn over fifteen thousand dollars. All well enough in the young and flippant days, Al thought; but he and Lorna were getting on.

As he watched the windows, where dirty curtains fluttered wearily in the night wind, he knew that he ought to postpone this visit. It wasn't safe. He ought to see Fingerstone first and get the money; for the money would talk. Dan had argued to that effect, and it had been more stubbornness than anything else that had made Al hold out against him. Now that Dan had left him to himself, Al was willing to admit that there was a good deal in this argument.

There were dangers in being seen on the street, but there were greater dangers in being cooped up in a room with only one exit. Al had an uneasy premonition of bad luck. Something always happened to him when he was about to make a lot of money.

However, he wanted to see Lorna. She was his wife, even if man-made law had parted them; and she ought to be ready to settle down. If she didn't—well, there was the kid. Al had gathered from the girl's manner that she wouldn't be insensible to the charms of fifteen thousand dollars.

But the deciding impulse came from something else—from that pocketful of diamonds. Al, in his lucky days, had known the feeling of a fat and swollen roll, but never before had he carried around such a tinkling mass of gems.

He and Dan were to get fifteen thousand apiece for them. Fingerstone would probably get a hundred thousand. What the jewels might ultimately bring, when at last they had trickled into the channels of legitimate trade, Al didn't know; but he knew well enough that it was a great deal more than he and Dan and Fingerstone would ever see. Very likely this envelope full of little crystals, uncertainly resting in his inner pocket, might be worth a quarter of a million.

That was a sum which Al couldn't contemplate without uneasiness. It was a lot of money. Gradually his chest began to burn underneath the guilty pocket, as if he were carrying a package of radium. He began to wonder if passers-by couldn't see the suspicious protuberance. Certainly they might be expected to feel the burning

heat which was melting a hole right through Al's ribs. He must get indoors, where nobody could look at him.

So he crossed the street and mounted the steps of Mother McCurdy's with his best possible imitation of a weary citizen coming home after a hard day's work. The door that he had unlocked was still unlocked; Al closed it behind him softly, and stealthily climbed the stairs.

A moment later another man crossed the street—a burly, unshaven man, with a cloth cap pulled down over his eyes—and went quickly up the steps behind him. Dirty Dan didn't quite understand what Al was about, but he had felt vaguely, ever since he turned over the diamonds, that there was something wrong. He had had to give Al the diamonds, for Al had the acquaintance among fences that Dan had never had time to acquire. Al was an essential link in the chain, even if a weak one; but Dan's suspicions wouldn't go to sleep.

Even if Al were telling the truth—even if he were only going to see his wife, and intended to get away in time to meet Fingerstone—this was no time for low intrigues. Women loved diamonds; they knew how to wheedle boobs like Al. It looked as if something was going to be put over on poor old Dan; but Dan would have something to say about that.

Dan, no less than Al, was looking forward to this commercial transaction as the end of a run of bad luck. The world had never been fair to him, from the moment when he had to leave home as the only alternative to going to work. He had participated in the cracking of a few safes, but none had proved to be worth the trouble. In the glorious days of his fame as a street corner orator, he had been invited to dinner in certain houses on Park Avenue or Riverside Drive, where the social revolution was taken so seriously that it was felt desirable to have friends at headquarters; but then the war had crowded Dan off the front page.

When at last the great revolution came in Russia, and many of his friends went over to see what they could pick up, it was Dan's bad luck to be in Joliet. Dan had always held it against Lenin and Trotzky that they hadn't waited till he could be there. He felt that this little transaction in jewelry gave him his great chance to get even with society, bourgeois or Bolshevik. He wasn't going to lose that chance be-

cause Al Keeley had a foolish weakness for women.

All evening he had shadowed his partner; and when Al disappeared in the rooming house Dan decided to go after him. Just what he would do when he found him he didn't know, but he would certainly see that no woman got her clutches on Al.

As he had hoped, he found the door unlocked. Of course, there was no telling where Al had gone after he got inside; but sniffing about the half lit hallway, Dan caught the scent of fresh cigarette smoke, still perceptible over the stale reek of gas and cheap talcum powder, and of corridors that were never aired. Perhaps he could trail that scent.

Al had found his way easily enough to Lorna's door, and, as he expected, it was unlocked. Lorna had always been careless. Al remembered that their rooms had been ransacked two or three times when they were on the road. All her jewels would have been stolen, if she had had any jewels.

As the word formed itself in his mind, the sharp burning sensation under his breast pocket burned a little hotter. After all, he did feel safer here than out on the street, where any dip might get away with his treasure, or any strong-arm man knock him out and walk off with it. There was no reason to suppose that any intelligent burglar would try his luck in Mother McCurdy's, so long as any other house remained unbursed.

Al found himself shivering a little, just the same. It would be a relief to turn the gems over to Fingerstone and get the money. Al couldn't say that he was exactly accustomed to money, but at any rate it didn't make him nervous.

So, as soon as he had turned on the light, he locked the door and sat down with a somewhat greater feeling of security. He must speak to Lorna about that careless habit.

Lighting another cigarette, he looked about him, and frowned. No place for her to be living, her that had once been leading woman with James K. Hackett for three weeks and a half! It was shabby. This quilt, now—

Al picked up the tattered thing and regarded it with something like disgust. The worn silk medallion was half torn away, and from the gap protruded a double handful of eider down stuffing. A threaded needle thrust in the fabric told Al that

Lorna was getting ready to mend it, and he knew how she hated sewing. It was a shame!

Still more of a shame, he reflected, that this kid Irene should be starting in on that sort of life. She was meant for better things. She would look well in Havana. Well, one or the other of them would see reason. He would have to wait.

It was still—rather unusually still, for a Saturday night on Forty-Fifth Street. The noises of the street outside came to this stuffy back room only as a muffled hum, and most of Mother McCurdy's tenants were out.

Apparently the lady in the next room was at home, however. Through the thin partition Al could hear faint voices, which gradually became more audible in the prevailing silence.

"Never mind, deary"—in feminine tones which Al set down as matronly, if not motherly. "You'll be on your feet about this time next week."

A stifled murmur, apparently from a voice faint with illness.

"No, indeed, we won't let him get out of town. He'll be served with that order right off, and then he's got to support you till the case comes to trial."

"A fat chance I've got to get any decent alimony!" said the other voice, somewhat more vigorous now. "Everybody knows the bottom's fallen out of the picture business. Time's coming pretty soon when the only way to get money will be to work for it."

"Now don't you lose heart, deary. We'll make him come across. You've got enough to carry you over next week, I s'pose?"

"Oh, yes—and a two-carat rock over there in the toe of that gilt slipper, if the worst comes to the worst."

"You don't leave it around the room like that?" cried the matronly one, horrified. "With the doctor comin' in every day?"

"Oh, he don't go through my slippers."

"If I was you, I'd take better care of it. May be a long time before you get another like it. What with this crime wave, and all—"

At that point Al lost interest in the conversation. If one puny two-carat diamond was dangerous to its possessor, what of his priceless pocketful? If anybody knew what he was carrying, every thug in New York would be on his trail.

He wished he had let Dan keep the diamonds till it was time to see Fingerstone. Dan was a hard guy, Al mused; he was afraid of nobody, and most people seemed to be afraid of him. As for himself, Al didn't mind admitting that he was afraid. If a burglar should come in—

No, the window looked on a blind air-shaft. There was no way out but the door; and, insecure as Al felt indoors, he would have been still more worried on the street. He wished Lorna and Irene would come in. Somehow he would feel safer in a crowd of three, even if the other two were women.

The visitor beyond the partition was evidently going. He heard a smacking kiss of farewell, then—

"Well, by-by, deary, and take good care of yourself. Remember what I told you—if you get worried about your rock, let me put it in the safe deposit."

"Oh, I guess it's all right here," came the listless response. "Good of you to drop in, Ada. Tell Joe and Betty to come around when they can. Good-by!"

"Good-by, honey."

The soft closing of a door, and then a wild scream:

"Oh, help! Burglars! Police!"

XII

DIRTY DAN had been slipping softly through the hallways, following the scent of Al's cigarette, when a door opened suddenly before him, and a fat, pink-faced woman in a tinkling frock of black sequins stepped out into the corridor.

Two seconds earlier, and no harm would have been done. In the dusk of the corridor Dan could have slipped past her as a resident on his way to his own room; but the flood of light from the open door behind her had fallen on a burly, unshaven person, with his cap pulled down over his eyes, slinking stealthily along the walls and darting back suddenly into the shadow as the light struck him.

It was a purely automatic action that had sent Dan back into the shadow, and another that started him back down the corridor at the fat woman's scream. He dodged around a turn in the passage, and ran full into the tall white wardrobe from which Lorna, three hours earlier, had taken the quilt.

For an instant the shock dazed him. Behind him the fat woman was still scream-

ing. All up and down the passage people were stirring; the house that had seemed empty was alive with persons whose sole aim in life, as Dan saw it, seemed to be to aid, promote, and accomplish the conspiracy against poor old Dan.

For he had no doubt that it was a conspiracy. The woman who had seen him and screamed must be Al's wife. The whole thing was a frame-up to enable Al to keep the diamonds. Dan vowed that he would get his treacherous partner.

But the first thing was to keep anybody from getting Dan. He ran toward the stairs; thrust out of his way a young man in pyjamas, who came out of a room as he passed; scared two women back into the door they had just opened as he came leaping down the corridor, with his unshaven black jaw thrust out. Behind him the woman who had started the trouble was still screaming, but he had reached the stairs.

As he went down, three steps at a time, there rose up in front of him a huge gray-haired woman in a blue kimono and a lace nightcap. Mother McCurdy herself, who had rushed up to the first floor landing at the first sound of alarm. And Dan came down to find an old-fashioned army Colt thrust into his face, as Mother McCurdy observed calmly:

"Oh, you would, would you?"

Dan shook his head with a grin.

"No, ma'am, I wouldn't; but what's all the shootin' about?"

"We'll soon find out," said Mother McCurdy grimly.

Behind her a sniffing negro maid shrank along the wall. As the doorbell rang loudly, Mother McCurdy waved her left hand, without taking her eyes off Dan's face. The girl opened the door before no less a person than Detective Sergeant Donovan.

From the landing above half a dozen heads—nightcapped heads, curl-papered heads, bald heads—looked down.

"Did you get him?" cried a young man shrilly.

"No thanks to you if I did!" said Mother McCurdy. "Good evening, Mr. Donovan. I don't know what I've got, but here it is. They were yellin' bloody murder upstairs."

With a lightning motion Donovan frisked Dan. He found nothing but a pint flask, which he deftly transferred to his own pocket. Then he snapped on a pair of

handcuffs, while Dan stood still before that annoyingly large and businesslike Colt.

"There!" said Donovan softly. "He looks like a tough bird, mother; the bracelets won't hurt him. Now—why, welcome to our city! If it ain't Dirty Dan!"

"Who the hell are you?" said Dan peevishly. "You seem to know a lot."

"Oh, me? I used to be on the anarchy squad in the days when you were the boy orator of Union Square. What are you up to, eh?"

"Nothing," said Dan sullenly. "I come in to see a guy that owes me something."

"Well, you ain't very ladylike in your ways of getting it," said Mother McCurdy, "to judge from the racket. Upstairs, there! Tell that fool woman to shut up. The fire's out."

"How about it?" Donovan demanded.

"What are you up to, Dan?"

Dirty Dan had been thinking as hard and as fast as he could. If his partner had really tried to double-cross him, it would be easy to have Al and his wife arrested. He could even have them sent up the river, turning State's evidence to save himself. Of course, that would mean the loss of the diamonds. The police would find them on Al, or on this woman; but Dan would rather see the police get them than let Al double-cross him and get away with all the loot.

On the other hand, if it had been an accident, it would never do to let Donovan find Al; but Dan had to say something.

"I come to see a fellow," he repeated sullenly.

"Who?"

"I won't say a word," said Dan defiantly, "till you let me talk to my lawyer. I know my constitutional rights, I do!"

Donovan turned to Mother McCurdy.

"Who's that hollerin' upstairs?"

"We'll go up and see," said the landlady. "Bring him along. Now the rest of you that don't know nothing about this get out of the way. Didn't you ever see a burglar before?"

With Donovan's hand on his shoulder, and Mother McCurdy laboring along behind with her army gun, Dan went back upstairs, and down the corridor, to the open door where the fat woman in the dress of black sequins was leaning back in her chair, with two young men fanning her. Behind her a wan invalid was lying inertly on a disordered bed. Nobody would have

suspected that she had just come back from the closet across the room, and that a gilt slipper was under her pillow.

The fat one had stopped screaming, but it was some little time before she could get her breath for an explanation.

"Oh, my! I never had such a scare in my life! I was just stepping out of Mrs. Compton's room, and here he came slipping along the corridor, the low snake that he is—"

"But what did he do?" Donovan demanded.

"If I hadn't screamed, likely he'd have killed me and Mrs. Compton both. Oh, my! So lucky you happened to come, officer!"

"But what did he do besides slip along the corridor? Did he lay hands on you?"

"Mercy, no! I—"

Donovan cut her short. Apparently they couldn't get much evidence to support a charge of robbery, or assault, or even burglary, for to Donovan's practiced fingers Dan's pockets had felt regrettably empty. Unlawful entry was the best that could be hoped for. They couldn't even hold Dan for carrying a gun. He was unarmed, and Donovan did not intend to mention the flask.

"Anybody down in that end room?" he asked Mother McCurdy.

There was still hope that Dan might have tried to force a door.

"Only a girl that's playing in 'So This Is Paris.' She's out."

"But somebody's there," said Donovan. "There's a light under the door. Here, mother—you watch this fellow."

Mother McCurdy's gun pointed once more at Dan, as Donovan strode forward and hammered on the door.

"Open it up!" he roared.

Instantly it opened up—opened on Al, shivering and white.

"What's the matter?" he demanded shakily. "I'm only waiting for my wife."

The last five minutes had been the most unhappy period in Al's whole life—gloomier than the day that saw him sentenced to Joliet, for Al was a mild and inoffensive man who feared no jail so much as he feared a loaded gun, or even a clenched fist. It was worse even than that last night at Tia Juana, for when circumstances had forced him to fight he had still been sustained by the racial conviction that he could whip any Mexican.

From the moment the fat woman had screamed, Al had suffered all the combined horrors of the virtuous householder threatened by criminal violence, and of the criminal tracked down by the police. He had looked about the room in frantic search for a hiding place, and had found none. The closet was no protection, the airshaft was a trap; and even Al retained enough sanity to know that he couldn't hide under the bed.

Well, if he couldn't hide himself, he could at least hide his treasures. He thought of slipping them into some of Lorna's clothes, but that would be too obvious; and the conversation overheard from the next room had created a most unreasonable, but strong, conviction that burglars were certain to look in slippers first.

And then, when he was beginning to wonder how long he could hold the diamonds in his mouth, his glance had fallen on that torn, disemboweled quilt. The bulging stuffing somehow reminded him of the spotless cotton cushions on which diamonds are sometimes exposed in jewelers' windows. It was a desperate chance, but—

With shaking hands, which almost dropped their priceless contents, he thrust the diamonds deep into the fluffy eider down, pushed it back inside the quilt, and drew two or three nasty stitches through the silken covering—he had darned his own socks and mended his own shirts in certain periods of ill fortune, long ago. Then he knotted the thread, broke it, tossed the needle on the dressing table, and drew a long breath of relief, just as Donovan's knock fell on the door.

"Your wife?" said Mother McCurdy. "This girl ain't married, Mr. Donovan."

"I know this bird," said Donovan cheerily. "Guess we've made a pretty good night's work, mother. Put out your hands, Keeley!"

Al obeyed, but he made one last protest.

"I tell you, Donovan, I come up here to see my wife, just as soon as I got to town. That 'll show you I'm going straight. She's still at the theater, but she'll be back any time. Just you ask her. Dan, there—"

"Well, what about Dan?"

"Dan was probably coming up to see me. He's an old friend of mine, and I told him I was coming to see my wife."

Al was surprised, as he said it, that it sounded so plausible. Dan was apparently surprised, too. Most of all, though he

didn't show it, Donovan was surprised. The two ex-convicts behaved almost as if they were innocent.

"Well, mother," he insisted, "they're a couple of bad birds. Records as long as your arm, both of 'em; and they're in your house."

"The door was unlocked," Al declared, with rising hope. "It often is. I used to live here, years ago. Don't you remember me, mother—Al Keeley?"

"They come and they go," said Mother McCurdy. "Some of 'em I remember—the ones that beat their bills; but I can't place this fellow. I've had forty that looked about like that."

"He can come along, anyway," said

Donovan, "and tell the inspector about it. Can you phone for the wagon, mother?"

Down the corridor, pushing their way through the cluster of curious roomers who crowded in behind the actors in the scene, came Lorna and Irene.

"Here she is," said Mother McCurdy triumphantly. "Did you ever have a husband, now?"

"Several," said Lorna calmly; "but why rub it in? Why, here's Al—and in trouble, as usual."

"I come back to see you, Lorna," he explained eagerly. "I come just to see you once more. They're all down on me because I've had bad luck. Tell 'em it's all right!"

(To be continued in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

AN OLD LOVE-LETTER

I WAS reading a letter of yours to-day;

The date? Oh, a thousand years ago!

The postmark is there—the month was May.

How, in God's name, did I let you go?

What wonderful things for a girl to say,

And to think that I hadn't the sense to know!

What wonderful things for a man to hear—

Oh, still beloved, oh, still most dear!

Duty I called it, and hugged the word

Close to my side like a shirt of hair;

You laughed, I remember—laughed like a bird;

And somehow I thought that you didn't care.

Duty! And Love, with her bosom bared!

No wonder you laughed, as we parted there!

Then your letter came, with this last good-by,

And I sat splendidly down to die.

Nor Duty, nor Death, would have aught of me;

"He is Love's," they said. "He cannot be ours."

Your laugh pursued me o'er land and sea,

And your face, like a thousand thousand flowers.

"'Tis her gown!" I said to each rustling tree.

"She is coming!" I said to the whispered showers;

But you came not again, and this letter of yours

Is all that endures—all that endures!

This aching word in your swift, firm hand,

That stirs me still as the day we met—

That, now 'tis too late to understand,

Still speaks of the face I shall ne'er forget.

Though space and time be as shifting sand,

We can never part—we are meeting yet;

This song, beloved, where'er you be,

Your heart shall hear, and shall answer me!

Richard Le Gallienne

The Powellson Boys

A ROMANCE OF THE MINNESOTA PRAIRIE — THE STORY OF
TWO BROTHERS AND STENA JENSEN

By Howard Erickson

THE incessant beat of steel on steel rang in the clear air of the bright spring morning. A man about thirty years old, of heavy build and rather above the middle height, wearing wide blue overalls, squatted upon the sod beside a breaking plow. Holding a large, cold chisel against the under side of the metal, he smote upon the edge of the lay with leisurely and powerful blows of a blacksmith hammer. As his singing hammer rose and fell, he whistled in melodious monotone.

A few feet off, three harnessed horses—one slight and bay, two large and white—stood near a public wagon track, cropping the short grass still wet with dew.

The plow sprawled upon its beam at the end of a furrow. A score of narrow strips of upturned sod ran, black and level in the yellow sunshine, across the field as far as the eye could follow. On both sides of the broken ground was a plain thick with weeds, grass, and flowers. To the left, beyond the short stretch of prairie, crooked rows of young corn strayed to the border of a waving square of grain.

At the nearest corner of the maize field, close to the road, three buildings perched upon a knoll. One was a low, hay-covered stable, another a long combination corn crib and granary, while the third, a score of feet away from the other two, was a shanty built in the form of a lean-to, but standing alone. This shanty was the home of the Powellson boys, as they were known about the countryside.

John Powellson continued to beat on the share with steady blows, the clang of his hammer strokes keeping tune to his whistling strain. From time to time he turned an aggrieved, impatient glance toward the shack, and then again gazed into the polished surface of the plow. He surveyed

critically the reflection of his round, red, and placid countenance, with the rather large eyes of kindly blue beneath shaggy brows. Then, past the shining steel, upon the retina of his mind loomed the face of a slight, dark girl with eyes of alluring power.

He sighed at the picture his fancy painted there, and sighed again at the actual mirroring of his own heavy, thick features, with the rope-colored hair showing under his gray felt hat.

"I'm an ugly devil, I guess," he muttered with a rueful laugh.

Again he scrutinized his face, his glance lingering this time with a touch of pleased admiration upon the white mustache with its long, twisted ends.

"Maybe I am not so bad-looking," he mused. "I guess there are lots of worse-looking fellows."

A faint sound of singing came to his ears, and he turned to look toward a little grove across the section line from the Powellson buildings. It stood about forty rods from the road, in the middle of a field. Just the gable of a low, gray house and the dull red of a barn were visible through the few scattered trees.

A bent woman in a brown calico dress hobbled into view outside the grove, and began hanging clothes upon a line. Powellson stopped hammering, and his whistling ceased, as he surveyed the brisk figure with the washing, and listened to her lively hum of song. He thought how cheerfully she had borne all the trouble the world had crowded into her life, and how strangely her fortunes had woven themselves into his own.

He recalled seeing her that first time, after the tornado had passed—the tornado that had killed her husband and scattered

nearly every building on her place over the sullen Minnesota landscape. He saw again her little boys, one with red hair and the other with head of tow, as they clung to her skirts in fright and grief.

She had comforted them bravely, veiling with a decent show of sorrow her relief at the loss of Nels, her drunken, lazy husband, a liability to any woman, and not bemoaning too distractedly the real damage she had suffered in the razing of the farm buildings.

John had helped her to collect some of the wreckage and to refashion the house, barn, and sheds into structures habitable for people and live stock. In the years that followed, when he had nothing particularly pressing to do for himself, he had helped her boys to put in and harvest the crops.

It was to lend her a hand, almost as much as for his own and brother's convenience, that he had engaged Mrs. Jensen to cook for them after Chris joined him. The brothers lived so short a distance from the widow's home that they could walk to and from their meals in a few minutes.

"Her boy," the woman had called John Powellson, when she talked of him to other people.

"My, I wish Stena could have a man like you!" she had said to him, almost from the first.

She had told him then, while her buildings still lay flat upon the prairie, of her daughter, left with the child's grandfather when she and Jensen came to America. They had planned to send for Stena as soon as they became settled in the new country; but adversity dogged them, and they never seemed able to accumulate the money for her passage. After the boys were born and had to be cared for, and Nels became more drunken and shiftless, the mother's hopes of bringing her daughter to Minnesota grew dimmer and dimmer. They almost entirely faded when the tornado swept her home away.

Later, as John further recollected, when her fortunes began to mend, she succeeded in saving enough for a ticket, only to learn that the girl could not come for a time, because the grandfather, enfeebled in health and impoverished by the family failing of excessive drinking, was dependent on her. He was near his end, the daughter wrote, and she would sail for the United States as soon as she was released from her task of duty.

Mrs. Jensen almost momentarily expected an announcement of Stena's readiness to depart from Denmark, for every succeeding letter told of the worthless old man's ebbing tide of life. As her mother had long ago informed her, in exaggerated measure, of John's continued goodness in helping herself and her boys, the daughter never failed to express her heartfelt thanks to that dear friend of her kin across the waters.

With one of her letters she sent an old-fashioned picture of herself in milkmaid's garb—a likeness of a slight girl with a musing look that went straight to John's heart, together with her words of simple gratitude. Her eyes—jet black, like her hair, the mother said—impressed Powellson so deeply that often, as this morning, they gazed out of that face of hers with almost the force of flesh and blood.

"My, I hope you will like Stena when she comes!" the mother had declared to him innumerable times.

More and more she talked to him of Stena as of the coming of his almost certain bride. The girl's brothers chattered of it with the simple bluntness of youth. Their words, her letters and picture, and, most of all, his own desire, dinned into John's slow mind the notion that he was to wive the widow's daughter.

He linked himself the more to Stena, in prospect, because he had always desired to marry. It was an ambition which, till now, he had never had much serious hope of realizing; for he did not have the faculty of awakening the interest of women. Whether it was his own bashfulness in their presence, his want of good looks and grace, or a combination of these handicaps, the girls persisted in eying him with coldness or amusement.

He could not dance, and parties were occasions of torture to his diffident soul. Church was his only diversion, although he was too busy to attend every Sunday. When he went to church, he dressed with the showiness of other young men of the neighborhood, but his clothes never appeared to become him, and he was no more fascinating to the young and feminine population than he was in his workaday garb. Even the devout Lutheran sisters passed him by indifferently.

Once, indeed, he had all but succeeded in "making a mash" on Mary Nelson, who played the organ at the services, when his

good-looking brother "cut him out." John knew that Chris had not meant to take his girl. It was just the younger Powellson's irresistible way with women. He attracted them without running after them, without even paying them any attention. John had often thought how content he would be with any of the girls who threw themselves at the head of Chris in a vain attempt to interest that young devil.

Though he was aware that Chris not only made no effort to court Mary, but had actually avoided her, because he did not want to get in his brother's way, John experienced a severe strain upon his fraternal affections. It was the first time he ever had any hard feelings toward Chris, though passing resentment had often flamed up in him over questions concerning their work and property.

But John had ceased to think of other women since Stena came into his life, though she was still thousands of material miles away. And now he thought of little else as her face of fairy charm danced before him in the shining share.

From time to time he turned to glare with darkening face at his shanty door, but he continued beating on the lay. He paused as he heard nervous footsteps and the sound of his name. Facing about again, he saw Mrs. Jensen hastening toward him along the cattle path that ran across the fenceless prairie. Her gray hair was wound into a bulky, hurried knob under a red handkerchief twisted into a turban, and her brown, wrinkled face shone with smiling eagerness.

John laid down the hammer and rose to his feet, his heart pounding oddly. A white object was clutched in the woman's hand. It was a letter, evidently just brought by Mrs. Jensen from the section corner, where the mail carrier made thrice-a-week delivery. John did not need to ask from whom or whence it came.

II

"FROM Stena!" exclaimed the mother. "The old man's dead, and she will soon be coming to us!"

She was so excited that she lapsed into her native Danish tongue. Customarily she and the Powellson boys used the brothers' own Norwegian.

She pointed to a mourning border around the unopened envelope. She had rushed to John as soon as she had received the mis-

sive, so that he could share at once in the good news.

Hurriedly she tore open the packet and read the brief epistle, with its terms of endearment to herself and her sons and of regard to John, and with its announcement of the grandfather's death and of the writer's intention to leave for America.

The old woman's voice broke, and tears ran down her cheeks from excess of joy.

John said nothing. He was counting the probable days that would pass before he would see Stena.

His calculations were interrupted by the slamming of the door of the Powellson shanty. The man and the woman directed their gaze toward the shack, where a youth stood upon the stoop. He paused there for a moment, and then walked toward them with long, careless strides. He was slightly over twenty, straight, tall, with rugged, powerful frame, brown hair, rosy, smiling face, and twinkling eyes.

This was Chris Powellson.

"Mrs. Jensen," he said in Danish—a sure sign that he was trying to "soft soap" her—"do you suppose I could get a few bites to eat at the house? I got home so late last night I overslept."

The widow nodded with a sour expression, and the young man started off in the direction of the grove, whistling a blithe air.

While his brother spoke, John scowled blackly with averted face. His frown deepened as he noted the young man move with his wide steps down the cow path. This was the second time that week Chris had stayed out nearly all night at a dance, and had risen so late the following morning as to lose several hours in this urgent breaking time.

When John complained, Chris passed it off lightly, angering his older brother more by this attitude than if he had deliberately set about to shirk his share of the work.

John knew that Chris was grateful for the help he had received from his brother—especially for a loan that had enabled him to pay his passage from Norway. He had often spoken of his appreciation, though John thought he might have expressed it better by repaying the money. This never seemed to have struck Chris at all. Once, when the older Powellson brought up the subject, Chris spoke about requital in the future; and that was the last John heard of it.

When the two bought their quarter section, John reflected, Chris casually assumed that he was an equal partner, though John furnished most of the money, besides having usually borne the heavy end of the work, as he was doing now.

The slow, stolid John, though he sulked and snarled, had never felt like provoking actual trouble over the other's careless selfishness. It seemed small to let money matters come between the Powellsons; but to-day, as he watched Chris striding toward the Jensen place, apparently without a thought of the wasted morning hours, John's resentment flamed anew.

It was intensified when he suddenly called to mind the proposition Chris had made the other day concerning a Red River valley farm which the two of them had bought the previous autumn. Chris wanted to take the northern land, suggesting plausibly that John ought to stay here, where he could continue to be near the Jensen family after he had married Stena. At the time, this had not appeared unfair, as the farm on which they lived was more improved and cultivated. On studying the matter, however, John saw the probability of the Red River quarter becoming the more valuable, because of its much richer soil.

The feeling that he had been inconsiderately treated fermented the more in John's slow mind as he contemplated marriage; for now he had to look out for Stena, as well as for himself. It was further fortified by Mrs. Jensen, who was inspired not only by her great liking for John, and by her naturally selfish desire to see her daughter's interests conserved and advanced, but also by a certain antagonism she always had entertained for Chris, whom she held to be wild and unsteady.

Noting John's frowning face turned on his brother, she said insinuatingly:

"Too bad Chris neglects the work, staying out to dances and drinking beer, and never getting up till so late in the morning! After you have done so much for him, I think he ought to show that he appreciates it by pitching in and working hard, like you do."

"Oh, you must remember Chris is young, and likes to have a good time with the girls. Nobody ever saw him drunk," protested John.

Bitter as he now felt toward Chris, he did not want anybody else, not even Mrs.

Jensen, to say anything against him. John was a Powellson first of all, and always ready to stand up for the Powellsons against the world.

"I think he ought to realize," the woman went on, "that it is getting late for seeding flax, and that he should be helping all he can with the breaking. The idea of his asking for breakfast this time of day!"

John abruptly returned to his hammering and his whistling, impatient at this criticism of his brother, though it was but the echo of what was running through his own mind.

He soon forgot his grievance as he saw again, in fancy, the face of the Danish girl. He smiled, then frowned when he viewed his own rough, florid countenance in the mirror of steel.

He looked up on hearing Chris shout "Hello, Annie!" at a young woman waving her sunbonnet from her perch on a seeder in a neighboring field. The elder brother flung a glance of admiration, mingled with envy, at the handsome profile and lithe frame of Chris as the latter swung along the footpath.

"All the girls are wild about him!" he murmured.

"They are crazy," snapped Mrs. Jensen. "Stena isn't that kind. She'd rather have a steady man like you."

III

THE yellow coaches of the local train stopped beside the low, flat-roofed station. Two draymen, the combination telegraph operator and ticket agent, and a fat hotel keeper with a white mustache stood on the platform, greeting the trainmen by their first names. A few traveling men, with heavy suit cases, got off the cars and followed the hotel man down the winding, weed-bordered walk to the main part of the little town.

A slight girl with pale face and black hair stepped hesitatingly from the rear coach stair, with a bulky telescope grip in her hand. Placing it on the plank platform, she glanced about her with nervous expectation.

She did not see her mother or brothers. Perhaps their good friend John, the sweetheart of her girlish dreams, had come in their place; but she was sure none of the men about could be Powellson.

She had telegraphed to her mother from Chicago when she would arrive. They

must have received the message in time to meet her.

Standing irresolutely, in her faded blue dress, with her worn brown coat and little felt cap, she felt very foreign in a far land. The draymen and ticket agent eyed her with unreserved curiosity.

Then she noted a tall, vigorous youth with rosy, handsome face hurrying up the sidewalk to the station. He approached her with an embarrassed blush, and said in Danish:

"I am looking for Stena Jensen."

"I am Stena," she answered, blushing and smiling, and extending a small, work-scarred hand, somewhat in the manner of a timid kitten sticking out its paw. "You must be Mr. Powellson?"

"Yes," he said, blushing still more deeply, and taking her hand limply.

He explained that her mother had received the telegram that morning, too late for her to be at the train in time. Knowing that he was in town, she had telephoned him at Knutsen's store, with the result that he was here.

Chris obtained her trunk—a small, dark wooden chest with iron handles—and put it in the wagon. Together they set out for the girl's new home, half a dozen miles away.

Stena was confused, overwhelmed, at being in the company of this handsome, smart-appearing young man. Slyly she eyed him, noting again the ruddy face, the soft brown hair, and the twinkling gray gleam of his eyes, now so embarrassed, yet full of undeniable admiration for her.

To think that John was such a nice-looking man! Of course, she had known that he was kind and good, but her mother's personal description of him had been vague, and she had been afraid that perhaps he would be rather fat and old, and not "stylish" or handsome.

She wanted to thank him for what he had done for her people, but she could only talk about how warm it was, and how big and green the prairie seemed.

Chris felt himself almost as diffident as herself—a state of mind new and amazing to him. Always sought after by the women, he had never experienced backwardness in their company. He could not understand why he should be so self-conscious in the presence of this little, shabby, shrinking immigrant girl—he who had run around with school-teachers, and had once eaten

supper with the banker's daughter at a box social in town!

She wasn't even pretty; and that outlandish old country garb! But something intangible about her—her playful manner, wistful and yet timid, her pallid face, with its contrast of dark hair and eyes—affected him with enchanting force. He talked stupidly, disjointedly, like an idiot, making the same inane remarks about the "nice day" and the "pretty country."

Despite the stiffness and incoherency of their conversation, they smiled at each other whenever their glances met. When Chris would attempt to say something, and stumbled for words, the girl's shy grin would lure forth his own wide one.

They passed along the soddy, grass-lined thoroughfare through the flat, green plain until they came to the home of the Jensens—the little one-story dwelling with its gable frowning through the stunted trees.

Over in the Powellson field a man was plowing corn. With the reins knotted behind his back, he was bent over the shovels, gripping the long handles. The crunching of the steel through coarse ground came to the couple in the roadway, mingled with the creaking of the harness, the rattle of the chain tugs, and the puffing of the straining horses.

The plowman observed the wagon as it lumbered up the lane to the widow's place. He waved his hat, and, lifting the lines over his shoulders and leaving the animals astride the corn row, he walked toward the grove.

The sight of John brought a red wave of guilt across his brother's face. Not till he saw him there between the plow handles had he realized that, according to all understanding, this girl was John's future wife. In his thoughtless fascination for the young woman he had forgotten his loyalty to his brother—had forgotten, indeed, that he had a brother, till he saw him wave his hat above the corn.

"Who is that man?" asked Stena, smiling again.

"My brother," replied Chris, as he stopped his horses before the house.

Mrs. Jensen and the boys rushed at Stena, and half dragged her to the ground. All three clung to her, the older woman crying:

"Stena, Stena, my girl!"

After the hysteria of welcome had spent itself, Mrs. Jensen thought of John. Seeing him approaching, she said:

"Now, you must shake hands with John Powellson, who has been so good to us."

"Oh, but we shook hands at the train," returned Stena.

She wondered why her mother should want her to greet John when she had already made his acquaintance; but she supposed the words were inspired by emotion at seeing her, and by desire to have John take part in the family reunion.

Blushing and smiling as she had blushed and smiled when she met him at the station, she turned to face the man she supposed to be John. He was standing back with a troubled expression on his erstwhile animated countenance, and another man, considerably older and not nearly so good-looking, was holding out his hand and smiling broadly. The pleasant odor of fresh earth emanated from his clothes.

"He's John," announced the old woman, her face ashine with joy at the meeting of Stena and "her boy."

Evidently she had not heard or comprehended what her daughter had just said.

For a second things grew blank before the girl's eyes, and the level plain before her rose till it stood upright, like the wall of a house. Then it sank again, and on it the real John faced her.

Summoning her self-command, she held out her hand.

"Oh, I am so glad to know you, Mr. Powellson," she said. "Thank you so much for everything!"

In spite of her words, the touch of her hand was cold and the sound of her voice was hard. There was something hard and cold in her eyes as she looked into the face of John Powellson. There was something hard and cold in her heart, which she felt would never pass, for all her gratitude toward him—a coldness and hardness that was the unconscious cry of her young spirit at being robbed of the man she already had come to look upon with the emotion of love.

IV

It was a warm summer evening, without a moon, and the land lay calm in the hazy light of the stars. A slight breeze rustled the trees beneath which two persons sat on a wide, low stone in the yard of the Jensen home.

John Powellson was gingerly stroking a fold of the garment of the black-haired girl with the dark eyes—eyes that were turned away from him. He wished to put his arms

around her, to press her to him, and to kiss the white face; but somehow he could not. A repellent power held him from her.

Only once had he taken her in his arms and kissed her—on the night when she had agreed to become his wife.

How well he remembered each detail of that glorious yet disappointing time! He had come upon her in the dusk, as she was driving the cattle home to milking. She had paused to stare dreamily over the distant blue of the flax land in blossom—a deep blue, gleaming in the twilight with a sheen that brought to the man's mind the waters of his native fiords.

Borne on by his passion for the girl with the slight body, pale face, and hair and eyes of utter blackness, he spoke to her of love. She had listened without emotion to the stumbling fervor of his words, and had quietly answered "Yes" when he asked her if she would marry him.

As he pressed her to his dizzy heart and kissed her, she lay unresponsive in his embrace, her body limp and her lips cold, without returning his caresses. When he asked her to kiss him, she merely touched her mouth to his cheek and turned her eyes back to the deepening blue of the flax in bloom.

Now, when they were engaged, and the wedding day was all but named, he could not even lay his hands upon her—he whose senses craved the physical manifestations of love! All the pent-up yearning of a man who has lived in loneliness away from feminine associations, all the long accumulation of unsatisfied desire for woman's love, seared John Powellson's being; and here he was sitting at the side of his affianced bride, beneath the mocking stars, like a fool, not even daring to hold her hand!

When he talked to her it was of the flax crop, of the prospects of the wheat, of the precarious corn—those tame and sordid things of nature!

He could not joke and play with her, as his more boyish brother did. Those two frisked about like children, at times, and Chris handled her as roughly as the girl's brothers handled one another in their careless sports. Though he knew it was in veriest frolic, choking passion seized John at the sight. Unreasoning jealousy made him half forget the ties of blood that bound him to his brother, in a caveman's rage at seeing the hands of another male laid, even

in jest, upon the body of the woman who was to be his bridal mate.

When John sought to romp with her as Chris did, an unaccountable diffidence, like the feeling that restrained him when he attempted love making, stood in his way. When he overcame this handicap—as seldom happened—the girl was shrinking and reserved, as cold in response to his ponderous play as to his more serious advances.

"She's such a sensible girl," the mother had said when John, in first telling of the engagement, had remarked that "Stena doesn't make much fuss about it."

Mrs. Jensen would have preferred to see her daughter more enthusiastic over her approaching marriage, but she attributed her taking it so quietly to the girl's cool and practical nature. Stena had sense, she always insisted to John. She stressed this virtue next to her daughter's skill in household and dairy tasks.

And never did the old woman fail to repeat to him Stena's declarations about his goodness and her gratitude to him. The young woman, too, voiced that sentiment into his ears with the regularity of her prayers to God.

She talked to him ever of gratitude, but never of love. She did not love John, and, not loving him but another man instead, she made no pretense of love for him.

She did not resist his bashful, furtive attentions, however. She passively accepted them, as she had accepted the dictum of circumstance that she, with her young body and soul and life, should pay the moral and material debt her family owed the man.

Taught at every step in her hard, driven existence to submit to authority, to duty, and to fate, the girl stolidly gave herself to sacrifice.

V

FROM the first, Chris knew himself to be in love with Stena. Conscious of the understanding that she was to be his brother's wife, and never entertaining the least notion of becoming John's rival, he struggled against his passion.

He kept himself from Stena whenever it was possible, spending most of his evenings at home in the shanty. He seldom went about to dances and beer drinks, as before. When this was remarked upon, he explained that he had to have plenty of sleep so that he could get up early and keep abreast of John with the work these busy days.

But at mealtimes he could not evade her. While he and all of them discussed the flax and the wheat, his glance would steal across the board toward the face of Stena. Their eyes would meet in defiance of their wills, speaking the unmistakable language of the heart. Sometimes Chris would feel, under the table, the gentle pressure of her little knee against his own, setting all his blood aflame.

Again, on rare occasions—occasions that stirred John to jealous wrath—Stena and he would be drawn into the after supper gambols of her brothers. Even in this boisterous play in the presence of others, when they touched, their touch was a virtual caress, as dangerous to Chris's purpose of loyalty to John, he felt, as if he were at Stena's side away from everybody else.

He had not realized how violent his repressed love had become till John informed him one morning, as they were harnessing their horses, that he and Stena had fixed the wedding time, less than a month away.

Chris dreaded breakfast, fearing to face the girl with this staggering fact between them. He walked to the Jensen house, going out of the way through the cattle yard to compose his feelings. His appearance startled a cow calmly chewing her cud. There was a sound of a tin pail rolling over and over on the ground, and Stena lay in the grass, kicked prone by the animal she had been milking, the spilled fluid streaming over her face and clothes.

Chris stooped and drew the girl to her feet. Finding her unhurt, he began playfully to kiss the milk from her cheeks and mouth. Carried away by the feel of her soft, wet face against his lips, he forgot his resolutions, and fell to kissing her in earnest. She passionately returned his kisses.

"Breakfast!" cried Mrs. Jensen's voice.

Awakening to reality, the two hurried in guilty fear to the house by separate paths.

Amid the confused babble of jubilation at the table—a rejoicing in which Stena had to make a pretense of taking part—Chris ate in silence, staring at his plate. He could not look across at the girl he loved, soon to be the wife of another man. He was thinking how he could escape facing her daily here, and later in her own house—for John had said that he wanted his brother to make his home with himself and Stena after their marriage.

Despite his own loyalty to John, and Stena's to the benefactor of her family, and

her high sense of duty as fiancée and wife, Chris well knew that neither could withstand the temptation of constant proximity and mutual infatuation.

As he and John returned to their own place, he stated the plan he had evolved at breakfast. In view of the fact that they already had arranged to divide the property, and to assign the Red River land to the younger brother, he proposed that he should move up there this summer or fall, and get ready to put in a crop the next year.

The older brother was silent for several minutes, and finally grumbled that he "guessed it would be all right."

Chris went on to suggest that it would be fair to divide the loose property half and half, as the Red River valley land, being virtually unbroken prairie, was far less valuable than the farm on which they lived.

John's face grew black.

"Why don't you ask me to include Stena in this fifty-fifty division?" he had it on the tip of his tongue to say; but reluctance to precipitate an emotional scene, rather than fear of hurting his brother's feelings, restrained him.

"I really ought to go up there pretty soon," Chris went on. "When do you think I could get away?"

John mumbled that he supposed it could be arranged for Chris to leave in about two weeks. He thought his brother showed little consideration in wanting to go before the fall work was done.

"It's too bad you couldn't stay till after the wedding," he added hypocritically.

After considering for a moment, Chris said that he would take his three horses, which he would drive, a wagon with a breaking plow and a stubble plow, two cows, some feed grain, and his personal belongings. John could ship him the rest of his share of the stock, machinery, and grain in the winter.

"Yes, like hell I will!" the older brother said to himself.

That night, at supper, John told the Jensens of his brother's plan to go away. Chris suddenly felt Stena's knee tremulously pressing his. Her face grew paler than its natural white, and he saw her hand clutching the edge of the table.

The Jensen lads expressed their regret in sincere fashion, while their mother told Chris that she was sorry, but that it would be good for him to get out and hustle for

himself, without depending on somebody else. She gave him sober advice against running around the country to dances and spending his time making love to silly girls and drinking beer, ignoring the fact that of later months the youth had been working as steadily as John himself.

VI

On the eve of the day when Chris was to set out for the north by wagon, he left the supper table early, saying that he would bid the family good-by at breakfast. He went out to load his wagon, so that he could get a good start in the morning.

John had dug out his old revolver from his trunk, and had gone out to the flax straw stack, where the brothers had left some of the recently threshed grain piled in sacks until it could be hauled to the elevator in town. Thieves had stolen flax from several farmers lately, and the careful Powellson was concerned about the safety of the stack. He told Chris that he would keep guard till about midnight.

Having completed most of his preparations for the journey, Chris entered the shanty. It was too early to sleep, and he felt that he could not bear to look at the interior of this place, where Stena was soon to dwell as another man's wife.

After moodily smoking a pipeful of tobacco, he strolled out of the shack and along the road in the dusk. Scarcely aware of where he was going, he found himself approaching the neighborhood church, a little white building with a narrow peaked roof and a short steeple surmounted by a cross. He heard merry shouts of laughter from within, and saw rough triangles of light in the arched windows above the tightly drawn blinds.

He remembered that Mrs. Jensen had said that she and the "children" were going to the meeting house, to decorate it for the wedding. Some of the neighbors were to help. Chris listened for Stena's voice, but could not distinguish it. He turned away impatiently from these portents of her nuptials. Everywhere her marriage was flaunted at him.

He walked back toward home. Passing the Jensen house, he wondered if she were within. Undoubtedly she was, probably sewing for the wedding—always that damned wedding!

He hesitated. Yes, he would stop for a moment. He would like to say good-by

to her without other people looking on, as they would be if he waited to make his adieu to her in the morning.

Perhaps she was in the kitchen, as a light was showing from its window. He peered cautiously in, and saw the lamp on the bare table, the flame turned low; but he did not see Stena.

He stepped a few paces farther, and paused by a window that was open up to the middle, with the shade raised almost to the casement top. No light shone in there, and he was about to pass on, when the moon came out of a cloud above the trees and illuminated the little chamber with almost the brilliancy of day. The pink-draped form of a woman was outlined against the white expanse of sheeted bed.

It was Stena sleeping there, the moonlight playing on her with the vividness of a spotlight upon the puppets of stageland. Her face was toward him, the red lips slightly parted, revealing the whiteness of her teeth. He saw the dark lashes over her closed eyes, the black hair straying about her fair temples. A bare arm rested against the gently heaving bosom, while its mate lay stretched against the coverlet. A soft shoulder showed above the loose night garb.

He gazed at the chaste figure with its sensuous charm—gazed and forgot his duty to his brother, forgot everything in the wide universe of nature but that this was the girl whom he loved, and who loved him.

He moved with trembling tread to the door of the room and gently pushed it open.

"Stena!" he called softly.

She woke with a low scream, staring in round-eyed terror at the man in the doorway, with his hand upon the knob. As she recognized him, the deathly pallor of fear gave way to the flaming red of modesty.

"Oh, Chris! Go away! Have you lost your senses? What if somebody should come?"

"I had to come, Stena, to say good-by," he answered, his erstwhile rosy face drawn and ashen. "I couldn't leave with nothing but a handshake before everybody at breakfast. Stena, come to me!" he cried in an imploring voice.

Impelled by an unaccountable force, the girl rose, crossed the room, and sank into his arms.

He held her, pressing his lips to hers again and again.

"Good-by!" he breathed at last, unclasping his arm from about her.

She clung to him, wild with love and grief.

"Let me go!" he pleaded in his turn.

"Don't leave me, Chris!" she sobbed, still tightly holding to him.

"Oh, Stena, I must! I have to think of John!"

"Yes, I must think of him, too," the girl responded hoarsely. "I owe him so much for what he has done for my people. You must leave me now. You must go away and let me make him happy, even if it breaks both our hearts!"

But, despite her words, she made no move to free Chris from her frantic clutch.

The man started as a sudden sound smote his ears. In desperate alarm he tore the girl's locked arms from his neck by very strength. She staggered back, and, with a dull scream, fell insensible at his feet.

VII

JOHN POWELLSON lay in the flax straw, waiting for the possible thieves. He thought of them little, his mind being fixed on the time so near at hand when Stena would be his at last. He decided to go and see her to-night, as she was at home, sewing. He wanted to hold her, to feel her in his arms.

The flax thieves were not likely to come, or they would have been around before now.

He trudged across the stubble toward the Jensen farmstead. He saw a light in the kitchen. Concluding that Stena was in there, at work on her wedding clothes, he approached the house.

He quickened his steps as from far down the road came the faint noise of leisurely approaching wheels. He would have a few minutes with her before the rest of the family returned.

As he stepped out of the lane under the trees, he saw with consternation a man and woman in the parlor doorway locked in close embrace, the moonlight falling over them.

By God! It was Chris and Stena!

His brain paralyzed, for moments incapable of thought, John staggered and clutched at a tree to keep from falling.

A storm of conflicting emotions, hot and cold, shivering and blasting, swept him at the spectacle of his promised bride, the woman whom he himself hardly had dared to touch, clasped half clothed in his brother's arms!

A murderous frenzy seized him. Like a wild animal, with fingers tense as fangs, he crouched ready to rush upon his brother's throat and throttle out his life.

He was a wild beast now, this ordinarily placid, kindly man, as he saw his mate taken from him—taken by his brother, of all men! The brother for whom he had always provided, who owed him money and had not paid him, and who had selfishly taken advantage of him in the division of the property! And now Chris had stolen Stena!

Perhaps he was planning to have her follow him to the north. For was he not starting in the morning? Perhaps they were plotting the details of her flight; or was he going away to be rid of her, leaving behind a debauched creature to be the wife of the brother he had betrayed?

As John stooped there, listening to the sound of their kisses, he sensed already the feel of his brother's throat in his clenched hands. And Stena—should he not kill her, too? Her who had talked so much of gratitude! No wonder she had lain cold and passionless in his arms!

He could not choke her, as he would his brother. He thought of the revolver. He would shoot Chris down in Stena's embrace, and then send a bullet through her faithless heart.

He drew the weapon from his hip pocket and stealthily crept nearer the pair. He leveled the dark muzzle with steady hand at the man's temple, and pressed the trigger. It yielded easily at his finger's touch, but no explosion followed. He pulled on the trigger repeatedly, with the same futile effect. The gun would not shoot.

John swore in whispered fury, but the couple before him did not hear the curse.

He grasped the weapon by the barrel, as a club, and took a step toward his intended victims. He wanted to kill, and he could kill more surely with the heavy steel than with the flesh of his hands.

He stopped at the hint of something sad and terrible in the voices at the door. He listened. To his ears were borne sobbing, broken words of farewell—words that told him of the sacrifice of their love out of loyalty and gratitude to him. As he listened on, he knew, despite his first hideous suspicions, that their meeting was as innocent as their love.

The bestial rage that had overwhelmed him gave way to pity—pity for these un-

happy two who loved each other, and who, thinking of him before themselves, were renouncing their hopes of happiness that his might not be marred.

His heart ached for them in their despair. Then it was torn with a deeper agony for himself. He envied Chris, and would cheerfully have exchanged places with him. Rather would he go forth to endless loneliness with such a farewell from Stena than dwell with her in the knowledge that she loved some one else instead of himself.

Then to his resilient breast came cheer. To-morrow Chris would be gone, and in time Stena would forget him. In days to come, her grateful friendship for himself would turn to love—perhaps such love as she now felt for his brother.

The rattle of wagon wheels grew louder. Mechanically John hearkened to the sound, heedless for the moment of Chris and Stena and their talk and caresses.

He heard a scream, and the thud of a body falling on the doorstep. Stena lay quiet in the moonlight. Chris was running through the trees, undoubtedly spurred to sudden flight by the noise of the approaching wagon.

John hastened to Stena. Consciousness had fled her. Tenderly lifting her from the stoop, he carried her within the room and laid her upon the white coverlet.

In delirium, she seized him in both her arms and cried:

"Good-by—good-by forever!"

Her relaxing arms fell upon her panting breast.

Bending low, John kissed the soft, smooth cheek and rushed from the house.

VIII

STENA tossed beside her sleeping mother in fitful, uneasy slumber. At intervals of wakefulness she cried softly into her pillow. At last she fell into a heavy doze, which was broken by the bumping of wagon wheels—an unwonted disturbance in the blackness of early morning.

It must be Chris leaving for the Red River country, going abruptly in the darkness to spare her further grief at parting from him. With the one intense thought that she must see him for a last good-by, she put on her clothes and tiptoed from the room.

The moon had passed across the sky, and the prairie and the distant stubble lay in a cold and sullen light.

She ran through the dew-laden grass, reaching the road just as a wagon drawn by three horses passed. Two brown cows plodded behind, fastened to the rear axle of the vehicle with ropes looped about their necks. In the wagon box could be seen a trunk standing on end, plow handles, and the twine-bound ends of white sacks of grain.

It was Chris Powellson's outfit on the northern trail; but where was Chris? There was no man in the spring seat!

Then she heard the swish of a whip, and saw beneath the wagon bed the legs of a man moving beside the turning wheel.

All at once came a shout—the excited voice of Chris—from the roadway behind the wagon.

The horses stopped, and she saw Chris, hatless, his clothes hurriedly flung about him, rush past the hind wheel of the vehicle to the driver's side. Looking neither to the right nor left, he had not seen the girl standing only a few paces from him.

"In God's name, John, what are you doing?" he shouted.

Stena crept into the road until she came to the rear of the wagon, which had stopped in the track. She paused beside the nearest cow to listen.

John Powellson spoke in a low, dead voice.

"Chris," he said, "I am going to the Red River farm myself. I thought you would just as soon stay on the home place here."

"But," exclaimed his brother, "why on earth are you starting off in the middle of the night, without saying good-by to anybody, and leaving Stena when everything is all fixed for the wedding?"

"Chris," John said in the same dull, lifeless tone, "I have always lived an independent, easy life, without responsibili-

ties of wife or family. As the time came for me to get married, I began to get troubled. I began to realize it would be hell for a fellow like me to be tied down to a woman. Of course, I know it is tough on Stena, but life is too short for a man to sacrifice himself for somebody else; so I am going away to avoid explaining. I thought I would leave without the sorrow of saying good-by to you. You were sleeping so soundly that I made up my mind I could sneak off without your knowing it. All I had to do was to take what you had ready, hitch up my horses, carry my trunk and personal things out of the shanty, and put them in the wagon. I didn't figure on the racket it makes to haul a load over these roads."

There was a moment of silence—a long moment to Stena. At length John spoke.

"Good-by, Chris. Be a—good neighbor to the Jensens."

"Good-by, John," came in husky tones from Chris.

The woman heard the sounding clasp as the Powellson boys shook hands.

John clambered into the seat and whipped his horses on. The wagon pitched forward, one of the cows stumbling astride her rope.

Stena heard again the spoken farewells.

"Good-by, John! Good luck!"

"So long, Chris! I'll write, when I get up there, and tell you when to ship me my share of the stuff."

Chris stood beside the road as the wagon disappeared in the darkness. He turned with a start, to find Stena at his side. There were tears in the eyes of both as the man gently put his arms about her.

"I wonder if he knew!" she said.

"I wonder!" Chris replied.

From out the wide vagueness of the prairie night came the sound of whistling.

A PRAYER

LEAVE last year's grief to last year's sorrow;

Let last year's joys lie joyously dead;
Give us this day our daily bread.

Of peace beyond I would not borrow;
For woes beyond, no tears I shed;
My hunger is all for the daily bread.

Not grace for the past, not hopes for the morrow—
With food for the now let my soul be fed;
Lord, give me thus my daily bread!

Grace MacGowan Cooke

The Quality of Mercy

SHOWING THAT JUSTICE SOMETIMES WALKS IN STRANGE
PATHWAYS

By H. Bedford-Jones

THE public has never solved the mystery of John Knuteson's fall. Few lawyers in our city ever attained the reputation for integrity and ability that Knuteson enjoyed during his career at the bar. To this day, few people know why or how he destroyed at one blow his whole life fabric and the future before him.

You recall John Knuteson, undoubtedly? Barely thirty, he was no politician, yet he figured large in politics. The junior member of the biggest firm in the State, he was famed for his policy of never accepting as a client a man whom he believed to be guilty. It is still told that, although not wealthy, he refused a fifty-thousand-dollar fee to defend a crook who had an apparently ironclad alibi which Knuteson had reason to distrust.

He was a handsome man and a powerful speaker. He had handled some remarkable cases. Through his achievement and personality alone, he was the most prominent citizen in our city — a large city, too. He was slated for the next appointment to the supreme bench of the State.

That was John Knuteson.

On the 3rd of last March his only child, a boy of seven, died from pneumonia. On the last day of March the Tilling case came up before Federal Judge Clark.

It is generally supposed that the death of his son had afflicted Knuteson in mind as well as in body. He aged twenty years in a week; yet I have heard it said that when he stood up to make his brief argument for Tilling, there was something angelic in his face. After Judge Clark told me all the facts in the case, I could well believe it.

II

KNUTESON, like most active and successful men, had a hobby. He loved lapis

lazuli as some men love diamonds. He probably knew more about lapis than any other man in the United States, for he was a deep student.

Lapis being only a semiprecious stone, John Knuteson could afford to ride his hobby to some extent. He had a passion for the deep, rich blue stone with its irregular gold flecks. His collection of Chinese lapis was remarkable and unique, and in course of time it had grown to be valuable.

Tilling undoubtedly knew of this hobby.

One night, shortly after the funeral of his son, Knuteson received a scrawled and pitiful note from Tilling, a man absolutely unknown to him. The note had been sent from the jail, and it begged Knuteson for help. With it was a large scarfpin. This singular missive concluded:

I have turned over every cent I had in the world to make good the loss. I have no money to pay your fee. I am sending with this a lapis scarfpin which I understand is valuable, and beg that you will take it as a retainer. Later I will pay you in full. I am innocent.

Knuteson glanced at the scarfpin and laid it aside. He looked up the case, because the pathetic quality of Tilling's note appealed to him at the moment. He had aged twenty years in the last two weeks, remember.

The case was obscure, of no moment. Tilling was cashier of a small national bank up the State; his brother-in-law was vice president. The latter dabbled in stocks, and lost several thousand dollars, which he replaced by unsecured personal notes. It was not a large matter, but the bank examiner dropped in at the wrong moment.

The vice president was out of town, and Tilling was not at the bank. He had been there only an hour a day for some days past. Tilling, however, had accepted the

notes. The shortage looked larger than it really was. Both officials were prosecuted, and the vice president shot himself. Tilling was left to bear the brunt, and was indicted.

It was natural that Tilling should accept the temporary notes of his brother-in-law, the vice president of the bank. It was not good banking, however.

"Either Tilling is crooked," said Knuteson, "or he's a damned fool!"

Nevertheless, he went to the jail to interview the man.

Imagine the contrast presented when those two men faced each other. Knuteson, despite his deep and bitter sorrow, had the air of one who walked with kings. Tilling, a small and mean person in manner, was completely crushed by the stroke of calamity which had overwhelmed him. Yet how much less was his grief than that which had befallen Knuteson!

What is a prison sentence compared with the loss of a son? So, at least, thought John Knuteson as he looked at the man and commanded his tale.

"There isn't much to tell," babbled Tilling, who was in a fever of hope and fear and eagerness. The words tumbled frantically out of him as he related the story. "Ben was in Chicago, you see. When his notes came in, I accepted them and let him draw on us. To tell you the truth, Mr. Knuteson, I never paid much attention to them."

"Stop driveling!" snapped Knuteson. "Have you the crust to tell me that you could O. K. such paper and never notice what it was?"

A spasm of agony swept over the face of Tilling.

"Oh!" A groan was wrenched from him. "You don't understand—how could you? Six months ago my wife died. All I had left was the baby. He was sick when those notes came in. I wasn't at the bank more than an hour or two each day. I was with him all night, hour after hour—and the little fellow died. I hadn't money for nurses and hospitals. I took care of the kid myself."

Here Tilling uttered an oath that was half blasphemy, half frightful despair.

"You don't know what it means to sit up with your own kid, hour after hour, day after day, and see him fading out under your eyes! To know you're helpless and that God ain't going to help; to hear the

doctor saying that he can't understand the case, and you praying and cursing and asking God to take you instead of the kid—and God stone deaf all the while! And then to go to work and stagger through a lot of papers with tears blinding you—how was I to do my work, knowing what was taking place back home? Don't tell me there's hell worse than what I been through! But you can't understand that, you and all you highfaluting folks. All you can see is that I shouldn't have done thus and so, and if I didn't do it I can go to jail for all you care!"

"Stop! For God's sake, stop!" said Knuteson. His voice cut the babble of Tilling like a knife. "I buried my own son a week ago, Tilling," he added. "Now, calm down and tell me the whole thing."

Tilling, ashamed of his vehement outburst, obeyed and spoke more coherently.

While he listened to the man, John Knuteson grew older and sterner and harder of face. His thoughts were less with Tilling than with what he could see would happen at the trial. Perhaps it was an old strain of Scandinavian blood that was leaping and boiling in him.

"I warned Ben the last time it happened," concluded Tilling in despair. "He promised he'd never do it again. I'd have refused his notes, too, if I'd realized what they were; but who would believe such a story now? Nobody. And when I come up before old Judge Clark—you know what he is."

Knuteson knew Clark well—knew him for a bitter and intolerant man. Judge Clark, simply from the effort to be impartial, would be prejudiced against any case Knuteson handled. When Knuteson mentioned this, Tilling groaned and dropped his haggard face in his hands.

"Law is law and justice is justice," he said. "They ain't the same. There's no justice for me, because property rights were hurt. Property rights! And I turned over everything I had in the world to make good! Will you take the case, Mr. Knuteson? You're the only man living who can get me a show."

"I'll take it," said Knuteson; "but I don't think you have a hope in the world."

"I haven't one anyhow," said Tilling bitterly, "with my kid gone!"

Knuteson winced at that. The words lingered with him, sank into him, stuck in his mind.

"Tilling," he said, "I'll get you off if it costs me everything I have!"

III

PAXHAM was the prosecutor. One afternoon Knuteson dropped into Paxham's office. The two men were old friends, and John Knuteson had no reserve in making his plea for Tilling.

"I'm surprised that you've taken the case," said Paxham frankly. "Of course, it's an obscure case. At the same time, Tilling hasn't a hope in the world, John!"

Again Knuteson winced at those words.

"He's innocent," he responded, and told about Tilling's baby.

He saw instantly that his words had no effect. Paxham concluded that Knuteson, owing to his own recent grief, had been worked upon by sympathy.

Knuteson was watching Paxham more closely than the latter realized, and was still appalled by thought of the thing he had come here to do. He hoped that he would not have to do it.

"The bank directors are really the guilty ones," he went on. "They were criminally negligent. They knew Tilling was coming to the bank only an hour or two each day, and yet they let things slide. With his brother-in-law away, he had to show up. A small bank like that has no excuse for neglecting the personal element."

Paxham made a weary gesture.

"The law can't neglect justice, John."

"This is not justice!" exclaimed Knuteson with energy. He bent upon the other man a look of such savage intensity that Paxham was startled. "If Tilling could tell his story as he told it to me, any impartial jury would free him; but sympathy won't go in Clark's court. Clark will throw in some ironic comment that 'll break the man up. I dare not let him plead for himself."

"We'll do the very best we can for him, John," said Paxham; "but you know yourself that we can't do much. He'll have to take his medicine, that's all. If there was anything I could do, I'd do it for your sake. You've no business taking this thing into court, anyway, after the trouble you've been through lately."

"Don't worry about me." Knuteson smiled thinly. "See here—if I can find a decision of the Supreme Court that will bring a dismissal of this case, will you ask for the dismissal?"

Paxham shrugged.

"Yes—gladly; but I'm afraid you can't do it, John."

Knuteson stood up.

"That's a promise, then! And remember, if this case is dismissed, it is to be my last case. I'm through with the law. By the way, will you be good enough to lend me a book from your library? Mine is mislaid somewhere. I'll have it back to you in a couple of days—I want the Supreme Court decisions for 1904."

"Sure thing!" assented Paxham heartily. "I'll get it for you myself."

John Knuteson walked out with the volume under his arm.

Not a hope in the world! Those words echoed to his footsteps. All his own hopes had died when two blue eyes closed. Tilling—justice—no hope! It was like a Gordian knot which some Alexander must cut.

"The law isn't justice," he murmured with a mournful intonation. "There is no justice in the law. The law can see no mercy. Some day—some day this country will know what every honest lawyer knows."

He halted and stared up at the sky for a moment. What did he see there? Was it some vision of his own shattered future, his sacrifice, his failure, his victory? No. He was not even thinking of himself at all. Perhaps it was the fatal strain of berserker blood rioting through his veins, lifting his thoughts to some far abstraction.

When he lowered his head again, he was smiling.

IV

WHEN John Knuteson stood up before Judge Clark, he was smiling again. This smile was not of mirth, however; it was more an expression set upon his features, a shining-through of some inward serenity.

Only Knuteson knew that upon his words hung disgrace or victory.

"I refer the court," he said briefly, "to the case of the people *versus* Hickox and others, on page three hundred and forty-five of the Supreme Court decisions for the year 1904. By this decision it is held that under stress of acute mental anguish a man cannot be adjudged wholly responsible for an act of negligence. I shall have no difficulty in showing that my client, at the time of his negligent act, was suffering under very acute mental anguish, and that my plea is *bona fide*."

It is impossible to describe the consternation which these words created—the old judge, staring down at John Knuteson with jaw agape; the thunderstruck and incredulous eyes of Paxham; above all, the serene and lofty countenance of John Knuteson, who had now turned and was watching the prosecutor with a significant gaze.

Paxham remembered the promise he had made, and wiped his brow.

"I'd like to see that decision, Mr. Knuteson," said the judge harshly. "I have had some little acquaintance with the law for forty years, sir, and I cannot recall any such decision."

"It was not handed down until 1904, your honor," said Knuteson sweetly, and stepped forward with the open volume in his hand.

Judge Clark glanced over the page before him, with bewildered wonder in his eyes. Paxham, who had hurriedly sent out to his offices across the street, received a volume that was brought in to him, and rapidly turned the pages. Blank dismay settled in his face as he read. He looked up and met the gaze of John Knuteson.

When certain evidence had been heard, Paxham rose to his feet, acknowledged his defeat, and asked that the case should be dismissed.

Judge Clark looked from one man to the other. Reluctantly, almost grudgingly, he ordered the case dismissed. Tilling was a free man. Then he added sharply:

"Court is adjourned for the day. I desire to see the opposing counsel in my own chambers immediately. Mr. Paxham, kindly bring your volume of the 1904 decisions. I see that you have it under your hand."

John Knuteson stayed only to shake hands with Tilling. Then he went to the private chambers of the judge. As he went, he fingered the lapis scarfpin which was in his necktie, and smiled slightly. He did not appear a ruined and unhappy man. On the contrary, he wore the air of one who has conquered greatly, and in whose veins victory runs like wine!

The three men standing about the table in the judge's chambers presented a picture—Knuteson, smiling and assured, a stern firmness in his eye; Paxham, a combination of wild incredulity and dazed bewilderment; and old Judge Clark himself, regarding Knuteson more in sorrow than in wrath.

"Well, John!" said the judge evenly, when the door had closed. "What's your

fee in this case? What are you getting out of it?"

Knuteson chuckled, and touched his scarfpin.

"This," he said. "No money, but this. Tilling had nothing else to give. He thought this was valuable. As a matter of fact, it's worth nothing. It's what is known as Swiss lapis in the trade. Many people buy it for lapis, but it's really nothing but agate."

"I asked you, John, what you are getting out of this case."

Knuteson became grave.

"First, why do you ask?"

"Because Paxham and I have been talking together. I've struck something to-day that is new in my experience of the law, John. I don't know what to do about it. This book"—Judge Clark struck the volume of Supreme Court decisions—"cites a case on page three hundred and forty-five, but that case is not entered in the index. Now, John, before I say any more, tell me what you're getting."

"Very well," said Knuteson quietly. "I'm getting justice out of it for my client. That's all—absolutely all. Before I came into court to-day, judge, I resigned from the firm; I also resigned from the bar association. I shall never practice law again. You may call that a high price to pay, but I don't. I am satisfied. Are you?"

That final sharp, short question drove home with stunning force. For once Judge Clark was silenced. He perceived that in his hands was laid the decision—and he hesitated. It was Paxham who took up the volume and held it toward Knuteson.

"John," he said, "I can't believe this, but it's true. You'd better borrow this book again and return it to me later. We're your friends, John; this thing must get no publicity."

"Thanks," said Knuteson, and took the book. "I was going to ask for the loan of it."

Paxham turned and went out of the room.

Judge Clark looked at the younger man. His intolerant, uncompromising features were very harshly set and bitterly lined.

"John, you've made a mock of the law to-day. Have you any plea to offer?"

Knuteson shook his head.

"Nothing more than has already been said much better, judge—'The quality of mercy is not strained.'"

Judge Clark looked at him for a long moment, then turned to the window.

"Go home, John," was all he said. "I wish you had never seen this man Tilling!"

V

So John Knuteson went home—a ruined man, every one said, though no one knew just how or why.

At home, he paid a printer's bill. Then he replaced a page in his own volume and

in Paxham's volume of Supreme Court decisions, with the original pages—which did not mention the case he had cited. After that, when any one asked him why he wore a large lapis scarfpin, which did not look like very good lapis, he would smile.

"A symbol," was his answer. "A symbol of victory in defeat."

And Tilling never knew that justice had been won for him by fraud—and purchased at a heavy price.

A Magic to Beat Enata's

THE STORY OF MAI ANGRIKI AND THE BOX THAT MADE GREEN FIRE

By Herman Howard Matteson

THROUGH my office window I could glimpse the Valkyrie, a fore and aft schooner, lying warped to the wharf, ready to receive her cargo of lumber for the South Seas. She had just come in light, her only cargo thirty-seven men of all colors—bloods and mixtures that Larsen had picked up here and there among the islands to serve as laborers, roustabouts, and swampers in our mill and logging camps. It is difficult to keep a full complement of white men in this remote spot on the British Columbia shore.

I had just completed the task, which fell to me as company doctor, of examining Larsen's thirty-seven men, seeing to it that no glaucoma, beriberi, or leprosy found its way into our camps.

From the direction of the Valkyrie there came suddenly a prodigious thumping and knocking, oaths and wild cries and sounds of blows. As I rose from my chair and made for the window, Dan Brokaw entered the office. Dan, a rigging slinger, had suffered a broken wrist two weeks before. He had just come in pursuant to orders, to allow me to take a look at the shattered bones with the X ray.

I motioned Dan to a seat, lifted the sash, and thrust my head out of the window. I wanted to learn what might be the trouble aboard the Valkyrie.

Svend Larsen, the skipper of the Valkyrie, a gigantic Northman, so blond as to be almost albino, came roaring up the companionway, dragging something after him that might have been a bundle of discarded old clothes. He stood the bundle on end, gave the top end a terrific slap, and dragged the thing to the rail and down the gangplank to the dock. Then I saw that the bundle was really a man.

Across the wharf Svend urged the wretch, through the yard between piles of lumber, and straight to my office. As I heard him clattering upon the stair, still mouthing oaths of destruction, I motioned Brokaw to the chair, snapped on the current of the X ray, and lifted the fluoroscope for a look at the fractured bones.

The door came crashing open. Into the midst of the floor Larsen hurled the bundle of rags. The man slid to his knees and came to a stop, with his face almost touching the green, sputtering tube of the X ray.

With a cry of fear, the wretch shrank away from the tube and struggled to his feet. His pale, weak eyes staring, his face twitching nervously, the fellow continued to stare over his shoulder at the X ray, muttering to himself. I have never seen a more perfect picture of terror.

I snapped off the current from the tube, and the green flicker of light ceased. Dan

Brokaw rose from the chair and went grinning out of the office.

"Doctor!" roared Svend Larsen, pointing his vast pink hand at his captive. "You see das faller har? You see if he got bad disease. He no got some sickness, he go to work in mill!"

I gave the fellow a look. He appeared a candidate for a hospital bed rather than a place in a sawmill. Still he slunk away from the X-ray apparatus. No longer, apparently, had he any fear of the manhandling skipper, but only of the thing that sputtered green fire.

"You see das faller har?" again demanded Larsen. "I yust find das faller. He stow away on my ship. I find him in my cubby where he break in. He eat two bundle salt fish, he eat two stacks of flat brot!"

Larsen shook a tremendous fist at the back of the stowaway. Then he megaphoned his great hands to his lips.

"Worst thing, doctor, das faller he find two bottle aqua vit and two bottle Canary wine, and he drink up it all. I got good notion to break his damn eye!"

Then I had it all clear. The fellow had stowed upon the Valkyrie. Desperate with hunger, he had broken into the cubby of the captain's private stock of eatables and drinkables, and had consumed the items as enumerated.

"What do you wish me to do with him, captain?" I asked, suppressing a smile before Larsen's truculent glare.

"You see he got no sickness. If he's all right, he go to work in the mill. I tell Yim Flynn to hold out his wages till he pay me back for das flat brot and aqua vit."

I called the fellow to me and looked him over. Attenuated to a degree, pitifully undernourished in spite of his inroads upon the Larsen cubby, the man bore no sign or symptom of any of the Oriental plagues that both Canada and the United States strive to exclude from their shores.

Twice I asked the fellow his name and nationality. Obsessed with the X-ray apparatus, he was oblivious to my questions, but continued to stare from his weak and watery eyes at the contrivance in the corner.

"Green fire!" he said finally, still ignoring my questions. "It makes green fire!"

"Yes," I said, "it makes green fire. But tell me, what is your name? Where did

you come from? You're a white man, aren't you?"

"My name," he said, giving me a furtive look, then hanging his head guiltily. "My name—I don't know. When I was a little boy, I floated in on a hatch. Because of that, they called me Mai Angriki, one who drifted in."

"Where did you stow aboard the schooner, Mai?"

"An island near St. Bon."

I turned to Svend Larsen, who nodded his head.

"Yes," said the skipper. "I recruited half a dozen hands at Hallekiu, near St. Bon Island. Das faller he stow aboard at Hallekiu."

"Well," I said, "he's all right—no glaucoma, no beriberi, no leprosy; but the poor sun of a gun is starved to death, Larsen. Better let him feed up a few days in the chuck shack before you set him to work."

"No!" roared the skipper.

Clutching his great grabhook hand into the man's thin shoulder, he dragged him from the office and across the mill yard to the office of the superintendent, Flynn.

II

WITHIN five minutes after the whistle had blown, marking the change in mill and yards from the day shift to the night shift, Mai Angriki, his cotton-clad shoulders covered with a sift of ash and sawdust, stood at my office door. Timorously he entered. In the waistband of his torn dungaree trousers was thrust the handle of the hooked implement that loggers and mill men call a hookaroon.

"I get job work," he said, a bit proudly, but darting an apprehensive glance toward the X ray. "In eight days my wages pays back Skipper Larsen. Then the money is my own!"

"But are you able to hold down the hookaroon job?" I asked. "Isn't it pretty heavy?"

"Oh, yes. Sometimes big timbers come; but I can do the work—sure!"

The hookaroon man stands at the end of the roller carrier. A similar carrier from within the mill brings out slabs, cuttings, and now and then a whole log end discarded by the sawyers. The mill roustabout, either running beside the mill carrier or riding the larger bits of timber, delivers the waste into the keeping of the hookaroon man, who follows it along the burner car-

rier, sees to it that the timber does not foul or get crosswise, and keeps it on the rollers until it drops into the maw of the twenty-five-foot burner, whose roaring fires supply heat to the kilns.

"Work is heavy," repeated Mai Angriki, "but I do it all right. I get three dollars a day wages. I think maybe you be glad to know I get job work and pay back Skipper Larsen."

"Yes," I agreed—sincerely enough, too. "I am glad to know that you will soon be square with Larsen. Won't you come in and sit down for a minute?"

The man sidled to a chair, his gaze bent over his shoulder toward the X ray.

"It makes fire," he said in an awed voice, pointing. "Green fire!"

I snapped on the current. When the uncanny light began to waver and smoke in the tube, Mai Angriki's teeth began to chatter.

"Come on," I coaxed. "It won't hurt you."

Finally I urged him to the chair, held his hand and wrist before the flicker, and placed the fluoroscope to his eyes. In wonderment he gazed through the little box that enabled him to see the bones of his hands open and close as he worked his fingers. When I shut off the current, he was trembling in every limb, and cold sweat stood upon his forehead.

"It makes fire," he whispered. "Green fire!"

Without another word he hurried across the room, emerged from the door, and went on to the chuck shack, in the doorway of which Let Gee, the bull cook, stood mauling a big gong.

A second evening came Mai Angriki, and a third. About his fourth or fifth visit, less fearful now of the spluttering green fire, which again I turned on for his benefit, he lifted the fluoroscope in his thin hands, and asked me solemnly how much money it would take to buy it.

"Not so very much," I said. "But what do you want with a fluoroscope?"

"A strong devil-devil charm," he said, lifting the thing reverently. "It keeps away the fire curse. You let me buy it after while with my wages money?"

"No," I said. "I would have to send away to the States for another. This thing is no good to you or to any one, unless you have the X-ray outfit that goes with it. What are you driving at, Mai? What's

all this miserable hocus-pocus about the fire curse?"

He looked around the office and leaned toward me.

"One time," he whispered, "a devil-devil doctor put the fire curse on me, and on another. I want a charm—a stronger charm than the medicine of the devil-devil. You make me one strong medicine charm, doctor?"

"Not in my line," I answered. "What's the big idea?"

"It is about Enata, who feared not the fire," answered Mai Angriki. "Enata is strongest devil-devil in all the South Seas. He put the curse on me, and he put the curse on Ata."

"Ata! And who is Ata?"

"Ata is my *vahine*—my woman."

"You've a native wife, then, Mai? Have you always lived in the islands?"

"Always," he said, "since I drifted in on the hatch, a *tama iti*—a very little boy."

Mai stood whispering to himself.

"A strong devil-devil was Enata. He'd make a man's arms and legs to shrivel. He'd burn the courage from a man's heart. Fire he did not fear, for he was its master, and it his servant. A very strong devil-devil. But green fire—ah, could Enata master fire that is green? I wonder!"

He turned and made a respectful body bend in the direction of the X ray.

"Anything, all my wages, anything I will give for the green fire charm that is stronger than Enata's magic!"

III

For a moment I studied Mai Angriki curiously. He was a white man; but, having lived all his days among the Polynesians, he was as superstitious and benighted as they. To Mai Angriki the X ray was simply superlative white man's magic. To attempt to prove otherwise to him would be a waste of time.

"How did this devil-devil Enata operate?" I asked.

Mai Angriki shook his head.

"How could I know? Devil magic is not worked beneath the noonday sun, but in secret and in dark places."

"What happened? What did Enata do to you and your *vahine*?"

The fellow's pale features drew with sudden pain. Folding his thin hands resignedly, he seated himself precariously upon the edge of a chair.

"I don't know where I came from," he said. "I don't know my name. On Nen-go Island I grew up with the other *tamas* and *pahoës*—the boys and girls. I fought with the land crabs along the shore. I learned to dive for pearl shell when I was about so tall. I helped to gather the pandanus fiber that Mother Malekule wove into mats. I was happy—ah, yes, for in the second hut from the hut of Malekule lived Ata. Yes, Ata!

"Then came Enata to our island. It was over, past, gone, my happiness and the happiness of Ata. Enata was the typhoon cloud that blots away the sun. Enata let his hungry eyes dwell upon the sweet flesh of my Ata, her round body, and greatly desired her. Standing in the midst of three fires, Enata said the curse that would bring the spotted sickness upon the village unless Ata came to him. Even Malekule urged her to go; but no! In the hollow of this arm here that I hold up to the sky and swear that I tell the truth, she cried and cried and whispered to me that she would not go to the devil-devil.

"In the night we fled, Ata and me, to the hills, to the forbidden place. This is an ancient temple sacred to the gods, and taboo to any woman. Still, though it is taboo to woman, it is sanctuary to any that dares enter it. In the forbidden place we believed that we were safe; but no! Enata, whose magic was stronger than the taboo of the forbidden place, came seeking Ata.

"At the border of the clearing I met him. We fought. A big man, strong with the power of his devil spirits, and perhaps because it was the will of the gods, Enata beat me. I, too, was strong in that day—tall and strong and straight; but the devil magic of Enata overcame me. As he struck me down, I drew my *tabe*, the knife with which one splits pearl shell, and I sank the blade thrice into his flesh. He did not die. He is a devil. He stood with blood dripping down his breast, laughed, and struck me upon the head with his war club.

"When consciousness came roaring again into my tortured brain, Ata was gone. Staggering, clinging to the trees and shrubs to help me along, I followed where the giant fern had been broken down, where Enata had dragged her. On a spike of thorny wood I found a fragment that had been torn from Ata's *pareu*, made of finest tree cloth, dyed with the red and purple and yellow that she loved.

"On I followed, and on and on. At last I was at fault. The wooded hillside gave way to tumbled rocks and boulders. No longer was there trace marking the fight of the devil-devil and my Ata.

"A day and a night I searched, crawling up the hills, sliding, falling, like some wounded wild thing. On the morning of the second day I found her, led to the place by her weak cries and pitiful moanings. With new strength I broke through the undergrowth, calling her name; but she cried to me to keep away, not to come, not to touch her. I gave no heed. At such a time a man utters many fond and foolish things. I ran to her, calling her the little names, saying the little phrases that are secret always between a man and the woman he loves.

"While she begged me to go away, to leave her, I cut her down from the sapling where Enata had trussed her up like a pig for the roasting. I kissed her sweet flesh where briars had torn and scratched it. All the tenderness that was in my swelling heart I tried to speak; but she thrust me away, bidding me to leave her. Constantly she repeated that she was accursed, that Enata had put the black devil spell upon her, that she was unclean, and that I must go away and look upon her no more.

"Then she bade me look. Where her *pareu* had been torn from her body, there showed between her shoulders three white spots. Three white spots, as you know, doctor man, are the marks of the coming of leprosy. Enata, by his magic, had made them come. My Ata was a leper!

"Upon the earth, near where she had been hanged to the sapling, were the dead coals of a fire. There Enata had kindled the fire over which he had said his magic, and now my Ata was a leper!

"But I would not leave her. Thrice a day I fetched her roasted taro and fresh coconut. From a distance I would call to her, and then I would place the food where she could get it, for by her express command I was not suffered to come near her.

"There came an afternoon when, as I went to set food for her in the accustomed place, she did not answer my call. With sinking, fearful heart I ran to where I had made a bed for her. She was gone.

"To the village I ran, shrieking her name. Old Malekule came out, put her skinny arms about me, and tried to comfort me.

" 'She is gone, your Ata,' said old Malekule. 'She is gone. The gold braid men came and took her away to St. Bon, for she is a leper.'

" St. Bon! It was over, all over. You may know, doctor man, that from St. Bon, once the door of the gray iron house has clanged shut, no one ever comes save wrapped in a winding sheet. My Ata, a leper, on St. Bon!

" Day after day I sat upon the hillside, looking away to where the jagged outline of St. Bon rises from the sea like the teeth of a vicious dog. Across that dreary waste of gray sea I tried to send thoughts of love to Ata. I begged her to answer me, and held to my ear the *eeo* shell, which the islanders say holds the whisperings of those we love. She did not answer.

" One day, sitting upon the hillside, I saw a man walking the beach, picking his way over the sharp, broken coral. It was Enata. I rushed down the hill and fell upon him in mad fury. I was very foolish. I chose my time badly, for I was weak. I had eaten nothing for days. He beat me down, crushed his heel into my face, and walked on, laughing.

" With five pearls I bought the counsel of Beletu, himself also a devil-devil man, but of less repute than Enata. Beletu pouched my pearls, heard my story, and told me to fight fire with fire. Nothing else for my five pearls did Beletu have to say.

" I pondered. Away in the hidden place I made ready fagots for a fire in the cooking pit. I placed at hand many strands of pandanus, with which to bind my captive. With a club always by my side, I watched for Enata; but his familiar warned him. He came no more. He had gone, they said, to a near-by island. Thither I followed. Again I made ready a cooking pit, with fagots; but never could I find the devil-devil man where I could attack him. You see, his familiar warned him. Ah, yes! Enata knew my plan as well as I myself knew it.

" My heart grew weary with futile watching. A ship came in, the ship of the Skipper Larsen, making fair promises to men who would toil in this sawmill far away. I went aboard. Skipper Larsen eyed my thin, broken body and kicked me overside. I watched my chance. I stowed away. I ate of the food and drank of the hot drink of the Skipper Larsen, but I shall repay

him. Here I am. Some day I shall go back to the islands. When I gain a strong charm that will be stronger than Enata's charm, I shall go."

Mai Angriki turned and pointed to the fluoroscope.

" How much days' wages will the doctor man accept and give me the little magic box?"

" Nonsense, Mai!" I answered. " There's no magic in that box—none at all. Now listen, and answer me carefully. Had your *vahine*, your Ata, ever manifested any signs of leprosy until that day when you found her bound to the sapling near the forbidden place?"

" Ah, no—no signs. My Ata was clean, sweet as the mountain rill. The black magic of Enata made the leper spots to come."

" Again nonsense, Mai! Listen to me now. This Enata is a foxy and wise individual. No wonder you think he has magic; but he hasn't. What Enata did was to place the end of a glowing stick lightly against the flesh between Ata's shoulders, in three places. A superficial burn has the appearance of the initial skin lesion of leprosy. It would fool anybody, unless they observed the case long enough to permit the burn to heal. Enata simply burned three places upon Ata's skin. Then, while the white spots were still there, he informed against her as a leper, and the gold-braid men came and took her to St. Bon. The chances are, with the careful modern regulations of a leprosy, that if Ata was not a leper when she went in, she still is not afflicted. If you wish me to, Mai, I will write to the doctors at St. Bon, and find out about this case for you."

Mai Angriki nodded his head absently. I might write if I wished, he said. My effort to cheer him, to explain the magic of Enata, had fallen flat. Instead of rejoicing over the possibility that Ata might be all right, and might be freed from St. Bon, Mai Angriki merely pointed again to the fluoroscope and demanded to know what I would sell it for.

" Oh, piffle!" I said disgustedly. " I can't sell it. It's the only one I have, and it would take several weeks to bring another out from the States. Anyway, I don't recall what they cost—eight or ten dollars, or something like that."

Mai Angriki arose from the chair and

without a further word took his way to the bunk house.

IV

DESPITE Mai's indifference, I wrote to St. Bon, detailing the facts as I had gathered them from the man's narrative.

The weeks passed by. Larsen and the Valkyrie had made a round trip, and again the fore and aft schooner lay at the berthing loading for the outbound voyage to the South Seas. An answer came to my letter. A few months after the admission of the girl Ata, the discovery had been made that she was not leprous, and she was at once discharged. The letter further stated that she had returned to her own native island, Nengo.

Such good news as that couldn't wait. I left the office and sought Mai Angriki, where with his hookaroon he was guiding bits of plank, timbers, and ends of logs down the chute to the roaring, red-hot burner. I read the letter to him. I could have shaken him for his indifference. He merely nodded, drove the hookaroon into a timber end, and led it to its fiery fate.

Confound the fellow, anyway! Feeling a trifle foolish over my officious interest in the man and his affairs, I returned to the office.

The company telephone rang. A man had been injured by a bursting block in one of the camps some miles inland. I grabbed up my kit and started.

It was evening when I returned. The fore and aft schooner had finished loading, and had weighed anchor. I could just see her sails fetching down the horizon.

I went into my office. Some intuition told me that some one had been snooping about. On the desk I found ten silver dollars, American money, and five dollars in Canadian paper. I turned to the X-ray apparatus. The fluoroscope was gone.

I went to the office of the superintendent, and asked casually about Mai Angriki.

"He's gone," said the superintendent. "He came running, and got his money. He berthed aboard the Valkyrie, working his way out. He's going home to his island in the South Seas."

"Well, the sucker stole—no, he didn't steal it—he bought my fluoroscope without my consent to the transaction. I'll have to send for another. I hope he finds that it's the strong devil-devil magic he thinks it is!"

On my way to the office, the following morning, the superintendent hailed me.

"Riley cleaned out the burner this morning, doc. Say, what you suppose he found? A lot of bones, cooked white. They look like human bones to me. Come and have a look, doc, to see if they are human."

I went to where Riley had disposed the bones in a neat row. They were bones of a human being. Somehow the bones of one foot had clung together, and in the midst of them was the iron point of a hookaroon. A man must have had his foot nailed to a timber with a hookaroon, and the timber had carried him down the slide and into the seething burner.

"Have you checked up to see if any of the crew are missing?" I asked.

"Why, yes—one of the crew is missing, a Kanaka by the name of Enata."

IN EVERY PORT

I HAVE a girl in every port.
Since you suspect me,
I may admit, in every port
Girls' charms have wrecked me!

When I'm away, I never have
One lonesome minute;
My heart's with me in every port—
She dwells within it.

Companioned by my favorite sort,
A wild or tame one,
I have a girl in every port—
But she's the same one!

Mary Carolyn Davies

Borrowed Fire

HOW A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FEUD CAME TO NEW ENGLAND

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Roof Tree," "The Mountain Woman," etc.

THE story opens with the marriage of Richard Carson and Phyllis Belknap at one of the stately homes of New England. The best man—Joe Carson, brother of the groom, and by profession a lawyer in Kentucky—has never seen the bride before. During his first talk with his brother's wife she learns that the Carsons and the Belknaps belong by the ties of blood to opposite factions in the bitter feud of the Wileys and the Powells.

Phyllis takes this deeply to heart. She has been in the Kentucky mountains, and has learned to love their primitive people. It was her intercession that gained a pardon for old Lloyd Powell, a militant champion of his clan, imprisoned for slaying a Wiley. In Richard Carson's cottage on Cape Cod, where he and Phyllis have planned to spend their honeymoon, she accuses her husband of having kept a vital matter concealed from her, declares that he has married her under false pretenses, and refuses to live with him as his wife. She agrees to a truce, however, consenting to remain under his roof until she has had time to think over her position. The two settle down to a strange and rather solitary life, for they have few neighbors—among them being Cullom Bowes, a former suitor of Phyllis's, and Lawrence Speed, an artist, who has established bachelor quarters in an old windmill.

Richard hastily blames his brother for the disaster that has befallen him, and sends Joe Carson an angry telegram telling him so. Joe has gone back to Kentucky, and when the message reaches him it chances to come under the eye of Lloyd Powell, newly released from jail. The old man infers that his benefactress is in sore trouble, and resolves to set her free, even if he can do so only by slaying another Wiley—her husband. With this stern resolve he sets out for Cape Cod.

XVII

LAWRENCE SPEED stood on the stretch of ground between the old windmill that he was temporarily inhabiting and the line where a shallow bluff fell away to the beach. Before him were canvas and sketching easel, and he was working rapidly, to catch in broad, swift effects the transient glows of constantly changing sunset fires. A qualified critic might have said that he painted with a cleverness above the mediocre, yet lacking the mark of genius, or even of notable distinction.

At length the painter paused, and, feeling a human presence at his back, turned his head.

An amused smile twinkled briefly in his eyes, for the gaunt, battered-looking man who had announced his coming with no word, and who had remained silently looking on, might have been a materialization out of another time as ancient as the windmill itself. The sharply chiseled contour

of the onlooker's features was not that of the native Cape Codder, and he fitted the background of this New England beach no more appropriately than might some bit of foreign-built wreckage pitched up by the tide.

"Howdy, stranger?" accosted the trespasser in slow-cadenced speech. "I jest kindly 'lowed I'd tarry hyar an' watch ye paint fer a spell. I hain't nuver seed the like afore."

"You're welcome enough," Speed assured him. "What do you think of it?"

"Hit's right good, I reckon," came the measured commendation. "I'd love right good ter hev ye paint my wife an' dawgs, only they're all daid an' gone."

Lawrence Speed stepped backward and scrutinized his effort through half closed lids, but in his brain prickled an itch of curiosity. It was a brain in which an eternal interrogation point sat enthroned, and this unplaced human being challenged it arrestingly. An intuitive sense warned the

painter, however, that features blocked to those lines spelled taciturnity, and that the straight lips could not be won to self-revelation by direct questioning.

"I'd be glad to have you sit for a portrait sketch, if you wish," he suggested casually.

His sidewise glance caught a sudden and almost hostile stiffening of the figure at his elbow.

"Not ef I knows hit!" almost barked the man. "But I'm beholden ter ye fer yore kindness, nonetheless," he added in more civil afterthought.

"After all," laughed Speed, "I'm not much good on portraits. I seem to have better luck with hills and the sea."

The eyes of the wayfarer went out over the breakers offshore to the purple arc of the horizon, where the sky girt the water. He slowly nodded his head.

"I hain't niver seed the ocean sea afore jest lately," he mused; "albeit I've heard tell erbout hit in song ballets ever sence I was knee high ter a grasshopper."

Then Speed, with whom ethnological research had been almost a passion, placed his man. His wide and catholic reading had not missed matters of dialect and folklore, and now out of that reading his question was answered.

This man's race was that distinct one of undiluted Anglo-Saxon origin which lives in the Alleghenies, and which, in its aloofness, has preserved the phrases of Shakespeare and of Chaucer, run to seed but still recognizable. To him and his people history had spoken only in the minstrelsy of "song ballads."

"You're a long way from home, then?"

As if regretful that he had been communicative in even so slight a degree, the man answered half reluctantly:

"I've done been a pore man all my life, but hyar of late I sold my farm, an' got me some leetle money. My folks had done died off an' left me, an' I 'lowed I'd go travelin' an' see the world. I aims ter leave hyar an' wander on right soon now."

"Have you friends on the Cape?"

The other paused, searching the eyes of his questioner, as if gaging Speed's motive. At length he said curtly:

"Save ter make my manners with some sev'ral folks I've met up with, I hain't skeercely had speech with no man but you; an' now I reckon I'll bid ye farewell."

He turned on his heel and started toward

the edge of Dick Carson's place; but after a few strides he halted and called back:

"Who lives in the hugeous big dwellin' house up thar?"

"That's the summer place of Mr. Richard Carson and his wife," vouchsafed the painter, who was now carrying his wet canvas gingerly toward the mill. "They're newly married folk. If you want to go up there and get the view, I'll show you the way. They won't object."

The stranger hesitated. It had not been in his plans to permit any man to make friends with him. His mission was a secret and deadly one, requiring him to avoid entanglements and strike without warning. He shook his head.

"I hain't aimin' ter trespass on no man's propertty," he declared. "I reckon I'll bid ye farewell."

There was an edge of severity in the manner with which the grizzled and raw-boned traveler signified his lack of desire for acquaintanceship. Perhaps the impression made by that spirit of rebuff was readably mirrored in the landscape painter's face. Certainly Speed's shrewd eyes held a twinkle of amusement, and he made no effort to follow up his overture with further insistence.

That quiet amusement, however, wrought an effect on the roughly garbed stranger which insistence would have failed to produce; for the man who had turned brusquely on his heel to terminate the interview hesitated, then wheeled and stood. His own features were devoid of any telltale expression, but his thoughts were busy, and they warned him that he was making a mistake.

A man who seeks to escape notice errs more gravely in overplaying than in underplaying a posture of secrecy. Lloyd had come with the intent of passing unobserved among men and women—at least until it was too late for such observation to frustrate his purposes. Now, by chance, he had encountered a man whose eyes were gifted with insight which might mark a wish to escape from the ordinary amenities of life, and might catalogue it as the conduct of one "hiding out."

Standing there between the windmill and the sea, Lloyd Powell was doing what many a tactician has had to do before. He was revising his lines of strategy, while his sober old face maintained its uncommunicative blankness.

One thing he calculated falsely. He thought of himself as an elderly man, poorly clad, who presented to the passing eye nothing to stamp him as different from scores of others in like circumstance. To himself he was not recognizable as a distinct and arresting type, who looked and talked like a pioneer father strayed two hundred years from his rightful time and place. He saw no reason, so long as he guarded his tongue and his conduct, why he might not pass through New England crowds as inconspicuously as a neutral-tinted bird flitting in the gray and brown shadows of the forest. No one had ever told him that the brand of picturesqueness was so indelible upon him that it separated him from the modern crowd almost as definitely as if he had been a Sioux brave wrapped in a blanket, or wearing a war bonnet of eagle feathers.

In his own steep country every stranger was expected, as an earnest of good faith, to give his name and business in candor when he was accosted on the highway. Every roadside salutation began with the question, which it was both discourtesy and unwisdom to ignore:

"Stranger, what mout yore name be, an' what business does ye aim ter foller hyarabouts?"

Now, in effect, such an interrogation was being put to him, and he was churlishly withholding his response. That this man, who had baited the old man's interest with little brushes and dabs of color on canvas, recognized his reticence was manifest from the amused eyes. That would not do. It made his wish to be inconspicuous more conspicuous than garrulity itself, and it might challenge curiosity as to his motive. So Lloyd Powell smiled.

"I didn't aim ter be oncivil, nor yit ter give ye no short answer, stranger," he volunteered gravely, with an amendment of tone. "I'm jest a stranger hyarabouts, an' I don't feel easy like."

Speed bowed, and, having in him the essentials of diplomacy, gave no further sign that he had noted the stranger's constraint or aloofness.

"That's natural enough," he said. "I'm sure, if I were in your country, I'd feel more like a fish out of water than you do here. I'm familiar with this locality, and I'd be glad to direct you, if you need any guidance."

Powell shook his head.

"I warn't jest ter say bound fer no per-ticklar place," he replied. "I war jest kindly sa'n'terin' an' broguin' erbout—a fol-lerin' up the water, es ye mout say."

The painter had now deposited his wet canvas in a place of safety, and had wiped his paint-stained fingers on an equally stained rag.

"I need a bit of a tramp myself," he volunteered. "If you have no objection, I'll stroll along with you and point things out as we go."

Lloyd Powell did have an objection. He had a number of objections, characterized by a positiveness that it was hard to conceal, for all his stoic training. He relished the prospect of such a companionship as little as the suspected felon might relish that of a headquarters detective; and yet he thought of no form in which he could shape a refusal without exciting suspicion. He nodded gravely.

"Hit's right charitable of ye," he asserted, "ter proffer friendship ter a stranger." There he paused, and then added slowly: "I've done been right homesick hyar lately. Hit seems like ter me I kain't no fashion git used ter rubbin' elbows with so many people. I aimed ter walk along somewhars whar thar wouldn't be no crowds."

Again Speed gave comprehending assent, with a nod just casual enough to admit plausibility in the attitude of a man who had set out to see the world and then elected to tread deserted bypaths.

Indeed, the quirks of the old fellow's disposition did not seem unreasonable. This wayfarer had come from a backwoods country, but that was only the physical aspect of the case. Psychologically he had traveled farther still, and had come out of the mists that wrap the past. It was not remarkable, reflected Speed, that, having steeled his spirit to walk the ways of modernity, he yet walked them with a shrinking of spirit and the reluctance of an immense shyness.

So the man from the windmill led the way through little-traveled roads, which lay deep in sand under the shelter of scrub pine and dwarf oak, and between fringes of brier and bayberry that suggested the wilderness. At times the pair came out and followed a beach line that seemed empty of human life—a line where the white sand ran between brown bluffs and brilliantly blue sea, where the gulls screamed, and bits of wreck-

age thrust up corroded ends out of long burial.

XVIII

It was evident that the stranger was not given to garrulity. If Speed had hoped to draw him out, like the *Ancient Mariner*, to strange and intriguing narrative, he soon realized that he was to be disappointed.

Lloyd Powell was going along with the painter because refusal to do so might have seemed marked; but all that was vital to Powell lay locked in the need of secrecy. So long as he himself listened and said little, Lloyd deluded himself with the fancy that his companion would soon forget this chance encounter.

As he walked almost in silence, acknowledging by nods and monosyllables the easy flow of talk from the lips of his guide, the mountaineer was none the less creating a sharp-edged and definite impression. There was an inherent dignity about him like the tradition of an elder day, and a sober courtesy more deeply rooted than the surface politeness of a hurried modern society.

Lawrence Speed, whose enthusiasms were all those of the scholar and investigator, read these qualities keenly and appreciatively. The man who fancied that he was neutralizing himself was in truth standing out in the broad-stroked vigor of vital, human portraiture.

At last, where the deeply shadowed roadway broke off at the edge of an expanse of stubble, Lloyd paused and gazed across a sunken stretch of cranberry bog.

"Does a man ever git ter feelin' *easy* hyarabouts?" he demanded abruptly, with disquiet in his eyes, which looked to right and left as if searching for some need that nature denied.

Speed smiled quietly.

"They come here from everywhere," he answered. "That would indicate that people like it."

"Es fer me," asserted the stranger tensely, "hit makes me feel plum' naked—like a feller does in them dreams whar he thinks he's standin' in the meetin' house withouten a stitch of clothes ter kiver him—unbreached in public fer each an' every ter behold him."

Speed laughed, but the other went on in unsmiling gravity.

"Yes, sir, thet's p'intedly the effect hit has on me. Hit's like dwellin' in a house thet hain't got nairy a wall ter shelter a

man. Ye scans all roundabout ye, an' thar hain't no mounting tops ter behold no-whars. Hit's all dead flat an' desolate. The heavens theirselves don't seem ter be up above mankind, like God's habitation ought ter be. The stars comes right down an' looks like they gits drowned in the ocean sea. Thar hain't no shelter ner no comfort. Hit's like livin' on a pane of glass!"

Speed nodded again, and silently kindled his pipe. This was the first outburst of feeling that had tempted the other into any long speech, and he had no wish to break the spell. After a while the mountaineer went on, in a low and homesick voice.

"Folks hyarabout tromps loud an' talks loud. Hit's like es ef no man didn't have no thoughts thet belonged ter hisself alone. Ef a body feels called on ter git down on his marrow bones an' pray, thar hain't skeercely a patch of ground whar he kin shut hisself off from sight with his God."

"I know what you mean," agreed the man of the windmill. "It's a shallow sky line, where a mountain-bred man yearns for peaks and ranges. It strikes you as a picture without a frame, a foreground without a background."

"Hit's wusser then thet," exclaimed the elderly wayfarer, and his quiet voice broke into an undertone of fanatical wildness. "Hit's God A'mighty's temple tumbled down flat under the sinful feet of mankind!" He paused, and then repeated, as if it were the reiteration of a wail: "Flat! Flat and low! I kain't nowise study out how mankind kin abide hit fer no long duration of time."

"Then you mean to leave it soon?"

"Yes, sir, right soon, God willin', I come ter see this hyar world of down below; an' now I've done seed hit, an' I knows I don't want none of hit."

As if with a sudden realization that his customary prudent silence had forsaken him, he halted, shamed at his own loquacity, and relapsed once more into profound silence.

But as Powell walked, his eyes and ears were taking in things that went unnoticed by the other, until his rapt attentiveness challenged questions—which brought brief answers.

To those ears, trained in the seclusion of deep forests, little whispers of sound were telling audible stories. To those nostrils,

keen as a hound's, faint scents drifted along the air with intelligible messages. To those eyes were legible writings in color and form which to his companion's sight were indistinguishable blurs.

Once, when there drifted down, from so far away that Speed had not caught it, the cry of a "quawker," as Cape Codders call the blue heron, the mountaineer halted in his tracks and demanded:

"What manner of bird air thet? Hit sounds kinderly like a fox barkin', yit hit hain't no fox. Hit's a bird flyin' high up."

The sound came again, closer this time.

"I'll show you," Speed said.

He led the way through a tangle where poison ivy trailed, to the margin of a small swamp. As they went, he tried to walk noiselessly, because he knew that among the high, feathery grasses and the lily pads a quawker might often be found, standing immovable on one leg.

It was difficult for the guide to make his way without clumsy noises. Once he stopped and looked around, thinking that his companion had halted, for he heard no footfall behind him; but the other was moving, not in Speed's wake, but at an angle, with his eyes fixed in glowing interest on something which the painter himself could not see.

Then Speed forgot to be the guide and became the watcher. Through brittle undergrowth and tangled trailers the other man was stealing forward like a disembodied shadow, his heavily shod feet falling with moccasin softness that did not seem to disturb a twig, and his bulk appearing to merge almost impalpably into the woodland browns and grays.

It transported Speed to boyhood days and boyhood enthusiasms. That old fellow, might have been *Leatherstocking* himself, past master of woodcraft and brother to the people of the forest.

The man from the windmill followed the gaze which the other had bent on the tangled center of the little swamp, but his eyes could make out nothing beyond the waving grasses and the lily pads. He knew that his companion saw more.

When his own less cultivated heel crunched a dry stick into a tiny crash, there rose from the swamp, with a heavy flapping of wings, the bird that he had come there to show. The mountaineer had been studying it for several minutes; and when he rose from his crouching position he de-

scribed it with a minuteness that astonished his guide.

That small patch of black and muddy water told the traveler a full story, which he repeated in brief and vigorous words. It was a story of the minute life of the place, a story garnered from eyes like those of a hawk, ears like those of a bat, and nostrils gifted with the keenness of a setter.

But when they turned back by another way, and came in sight of the windmill again, though Speed had learned much of a woodsman's heightened perceptions, he had learned nothing at all of the woodsman himself.

After he had followed the beach in the other direction until a sand hummock hid him, Powell doubled back and reached some heavy clumps of bayberry that stood off a little way from the house itself, this time by a circuitous route and unseen. With an eye accustomed to estimate rifle ranges and distances, he gaged the lie of the grounds, the location of cover, the general aspect of the place; and then he disappeared.

He had completed his visit of reconnaissance. His subsequent coming would be one of action.

After his job was done, Powell expected to attract attention. He hardly hoped at all to make an escape, but he would be ready to face mankind, armed with an adequate stoicism to endure its wrath.

He wanted to see Phyllis, to tell her that his proffer of allegiance had not been an empty thing; but to visit her, or to give her any intimation in advance, would be a poor service. It would make her, in the eyes of the law, his accomplice. She must be kept in absolute ignorance and innocence, and he must not approach her.

So terribly simple is the logic of single-mindedness, so uncomplicated the method of reasoning which serves one purpose only, that Lloyd had no doubt as to his duty, and no misgivings.

The old man paused at a wayside place as he walked home. There, before a farmhouse, in the sunset light, was a sort of outdoor toy shop, whose multitudinous scraps of bright color caught his eye. It was a place baited to snare the dollars of passing motorists, where typical souvenirs of the Cape are ranged invitingly to the eye.

Scores of vividly red, green, and white toy windmills whirled their tiny arms in the breeze, and veered about to show the

course of the wind. Weather vanes cunningly whittled out in the counterpart of swordfish and full-rigged schooners flaunted themselves. Sailormen whirling paddle-tipped arms shone in the sparkle of bright paint, and the breeze made them all seem alive.

Lloyd Powell stopped.

"I'm a goin' ter buy me one of them thar pretties an' send it home ter M'lissy's children," he declared.

XIX

As Lawrence Speed prepared his supper over the oil stove in his windmill, he found himself still reflecting on this man in whose silence, so rarely yet so pointedly broken, he had encountered an interesting companionship. He had glimpsed a mind uncluttered with the furnishings of ordinary education, yet meaty with wisdom and stalwart with sincerity.

Most of all he reflected on the quaint survival, in this unsteretyped nature, of those lost arts that civilization has dulled and atrophied in her crowd psychology. In ruder and more vigorous days the race survived by its keenness in attuning itself to nature's hard exactions for mastering these arts. Now, except in such human anachronisms as this man exemplified, they were obsolete.

Speed had invited his new acquaintance to take supper with him, but the stranger had declined with a grave politeness, and had gone on his way as simply as some scriptural pilgrim, cumbered in his world wanderings by nothing more complicated than scrip and staff.

It was not, however, with any idea of aimless roving that Lloyd Powell had gone on his way. After his close and secret inspection of the spot that was his objective, he went to the place of his temporary residence—the barn of a house which stood vacant and dilapidated, half buried in the rank growth that had sprung up lawlessly about its untenanted timbers. He did not know that it stood on the land of the man he had come to kill.

Except for the innocent trespassing of some child searching for mayflowers, or some rabbit hunter at a season when the branches were bare and the stubble stiff, it is doubtful whether any other human foot than that of the old mountaineer had trodden these grounds for many months. Lloyd had found the place as if led to it by some

dead reckoning of instinct; and now, in the twilight, he returned to it, troubled a little in his thoughts because accident had thrown him into the society of a man who paid him the dangerous compliment of seeming interested in him.

From under a litter of rubbish in the cobwebbed barn, through whose dismantled sliding door the martins swooped in and out, he drew the long package that he had brought with him, and loosened its fastenings. Sitting by the door of the old building, and keeping a wary eye outward, he took from its wrappings and handled, almost tenderly, the rifle that was so requisite to his mission. Though it was speckless and flawless of rust, he carefully rubbed its metal surfaces with an oily rag, and touched the sliding members of its mechanism with the tip of a small lubricating can.

He gazed meditatively at the old weapon, which seemed to answer to his familiar touch with an almost human readiness of response.

It was not a modern high-power rifle, which the mountaineer would have disgustingly called "newfangled" or "fotched on." Neither was it an obsolete and awkward muzzle loader. It was a repeater which carried a thirty-two-caliber cartridge, and fed from magazine to chamber with lever action—the old reliable rifle that made the West and carried the frontier to the Pacific. In the justly earned encomium of his own neighbors, "whenever old Lloyd sot hits butt ter his shoulder, he got him money or meat."

Now once more it was to serve him, grimly and inflexibly. When it had done so, he would have no need of his weapon again, and the price of its use must be paid without whimpering.

His inspection of it was more than a physical and mechanical thing. It was a ceremonial of farewell.

When it was over, and the rifle had been loaded and replaced in hiding, Lloyd Powell knelt on the floor of the barn, with his face to the open door, where he saw the paling fires of sunset above the pine tops, and "rassled in prayer." The words that came brokenly from his lips, and almost sobbingly from his heart, were shaping a plea for strength from Heaven to do work which he believed Heaven exacted of him.

There would soon be a moon. Already the stranger knew the country to which he

had so recently come. He knew any path or trail he had once traveled, and reconnaissance had been his prime concern here. One might have wondered why a man so set of purpose, and so well aware of the danger of delay, should let another sun rise and set on his inactivity; but that, too, was characteristic.

One matter yet remained before the hour struck. The call to which he answered had seemed bugle clear, yet the action that he meant to take was an irrevocable thing, and must not be carried out until every mist of doubt was dissipated.

"Thou knowest, Almighty God," he prayed, "that I aims ter take up this hyar cross, albeit I reckons ter be crucified on hit; but afore I does hit, Thou knowest, too, I've jedgmatically got ter be plum', dead shore. I've got ter see this woman, and make sartain thet she's frettin' ter be sot free; an' I hain't seed her yit."

When he had eaten his evening meal from the little stock of provender that he had laid by, he threw himself down on the floor and slept dreamlessly. Daylight found him haunting the bayberry bushes at the edge of the Carson lawn. He was as invisible there as a rabbit that had shuffled out of his path and settled down in the blackberry trailers not far away.

For several hours he squatted on his heels, as motionless as the stumps about him. At the end of a long vigil, he saw Phyllis come out of the house, followed by her husband.

"Thet's Dick Carson," Lloyd reflected with a start of surprise. "I'd know him anywhars. He's the spit an' image of his brother Joe!"

He could not hear what speech passed between the two, but the manner of the man was that of one who pleads a cause, while the woman seemed like one who listened, who sought to respond, and who failed.

They stood near the terrace in the sunlight, and Phyllis's head, with an aura of brightness about its hair, was bent, her face downcast. The man laid a hand on her arm. With a little instinctive gesture that she sought to repress, she winced and drew away. The husband raised his hands, as if in recognition of failure. He spoke in a low voice and turned again into the house.

After she had watched him go, with a face across which passed a spasm of pain, the wife turned the other way and came to-

ward the woods. She passed so close to the crouching figure of the old highlander that he could almost have touched the hem of her skirt; but he remained motionless and soundless, and she went by him with no suspicion of any human presence. Her face had the wide-eyed fixity of a sleep-walker, and it was a face out of which happiness had been frosted.

It was to the small beach down by the land-locked cove that Phyllis went alone, and it was thither that, unseen and unsuspected, Lloyd followed her. There, at the edge of the white sand, she sat with her chin propped on one hand and her gaze outward and unseeing. What Cullom Bowes had read in those unhappy eyes was read, too, by this old man from the Kentucky hills.

As he watched her, a great, if primitive, tenderness mounted in him for her. She was his kinswoman. Though he was a rough and uneducated countryman from a land of "do without," who had known towns only from inside prison walls, and though she was an aristocrat and a daughter of wealth, one blood coursed through them both, and for her he felt what he had never been able to feel for the daughter whose slatternly figure and hard face rose now before his memory.

Lloyd Powell had seen enough. He had no wish to spy upon her solitude, but against his heart settled the ache of a wretched conviction. When he had gone far enough away, he knelt again and prayed.

"I've done seed her now, Almighty God," he said. "Thar hain't no longer no room ter doubt. I'd done hoped erginst hope thet I mout hev erred, but Thou hast vouchsafed me my answer. Now I'm plum', dead shore, an' I've p'intedly got ter take up my cross an' tote hit!"

There was no escape now from his rôle of avenger.

XX

ON the terrace, just after luncheon, Dick and Phyllis were sitting in one of those silences that had come to cloud their moments together with uneasiness and constraint. Suddenly the man flushed with embarrassment.

"I've got a confession to make, Phyllis," he said. "It will show me up as an unmitigated ass."

She looked up, aroused out of some rev-

erie that had caused her fingers to fall idle over their knitting, and forced a smile. He paused, and his flush deepened. Then his voice became earnest.

"You've accused me of withholding certain facts from you because I was too weak to face the possibility of your displeasure. The same mistake oughtn't to be repeated. Though this thing doesn't redound to my credit, I'm going to make a clean breast of it."

His wife's fingers took up their work again, with the clicking of needles. His self-depreciation was so sincere that her eyes softened.

"Tell me about it," she invited, and her voice, too, was sympathetic.

With unsparing self-accusation he recited the story of his two telegrams to Joe, and quoted their foolish words. After that preface of explanation he handed her a letter which had come that morning from his brother.

Phyllis read it through and smilingly returned it.

"It was silly," she said; "but he seems to forgive you. After all, no harm was done. The second telegram must have reached him almost as soon as the first."

Carson shifted his position, and the scowl of self-condemnation lightened to relief on his engaging face.

"It's good of you to be lenient with me," he answered gratefully; "but, you see, I wasn't thinking only of Joe's bad half hour. He gave me more than one."

"What were you thinking of?" Phyllis inquired.

Again the frown furrows traced themselves between his brows.

"Of the idiotic indiscretion of trusting so confidential a thing as that to the telegraph wires," he confessed. "I pledged you to secrecy about it, and then I gave it a chance to leak out to other ears. Perhaps Joe meant to give me a gentle rebuke when he mentioned how narrowly old Lloyd Powell missed reading the thing."

A swift flash of the old teasing smile flitted in the woman's eyes.

"Yes," she said. "Joe seems to test everything by the touchstone of feudal animosity, doesn't he? He was conjecturing what my clan kinsman would do to release me, if he knew; but I'm not calling on the clan, Dick."

The husband grinned. The ephemeral flash of his strong teeth brought back the

boyish look that had been so infectious until the trouble of these past few days sobered his features.

"I'm willing to take my chances with your majesty's henchmen," he declared; "even though from your armed train you call to your *William of Deloraine*." Once more he smiled whimsically at the conceit, as he pictured the extravagant situation. "At that," he added, "I believe old Lloyd would go the limit in his loyalty to you, and I respect him for it; but what I started to say was that my concern over those fool telegrams was based on something else. In my heedless temper against Joe I wired what should have been sealed, if sent at all. It's a thing you'd be justified in resenting. It was done in pique, and of course I meant to edit what I wrote."

"I don't resent it," she answered. "Joe says that, as it turned out, no one else learned the contents."

"Joe assumes that, and I hope he's right." Carson spoke with the resolute insistence of one who does not mean to take shelter in fortuitous justification. "But, after all, Joe can only guess. In a little town like that, every man's business is every other man's. Such a thing might leak out in a dozen ways. He picked out old Lloyd to serve as an example. I can't help thinking that Lloyd may have seen what he did not seem to see. He would probably have maintained a blank face, even if he *had* seen."

"At all events, you were only indiscreet, and you are repentant," she told him. "If we had no differences graver than that, Dick, our serenity would be safe. If old Lloyd comes out here to 'git' you, I'll tell him he's come on a wild-goose chase; and since you call him my henchman, I have a right to suppose he would obey me."

Phyllis was busy with pruning shears and garden basket on the roses at the side of the house. It was a spot of many fascinations. It was not a new garden, but an old one revived. Honeysuckle clambered profuse and fragrant. Rows of foxglove and bright-hued perennials of many names and sorts made a gay and living tapestry of color, over which the roses reigned in crowning glory.

In every respect except that it had been blighted by her present unhappiness, this was the garden of her dreams, just as the house itself, save for its spirit shadow, was

the home her heart had planned. Now she worked there alone, a sister in loveliness to the roses, and she fancied that she herself was blighted. The period of the truce to which she had bound herself had run to half its term, and she had by no means solved the problem of her own heart. Already, however, the tempest that had burst so suddenly upon her marriage seemed more or less remote, and even absurd.

Dick had borne himself chivalrously and well. He had been the self-denying lover fighting to regain his lost position, and she admitted that her indignant wrath against him had been impulsive and exaggerated. The charge of dishonesty which had upset her sense of security was, after all, a question of construction.

For all this, the old fire and color, given to life by love, had not come back to her. She had told Dick that some main spring seemed to have been broken, and now she was sure of it.

Why was this true, she fiercely demanded of herself? What was the cause, what the explanation?

She had loved Carson with eagerness and passion. She had married him despite opposition, and then, like the bursting of a shell, a quarrel had temporarily disrupted their romance. Now that she was ready to admit the quarrel a thing of little consequence, why should it be impossible to go back to the joyous basis of comradeship and love which nothing but that quarrel had disturbed? Why had all the warmth and sparkle and eagerness gone out of her feeling? Why was all thought of their future together like the thought of a meal warmed over?

Unless it was because love cannot survive a single frost, it was inexplicable; but she knew, despairingly and bitterly, that it was true.

For all his obstinacy, in these days of measured resolves, she had somehow felt that Dick was weaker than she. The strength that she had admired and respected had been leveled until she could no longer look up to it. The element of hero worship was as dead as the withered mummy of a Pharaoh. The idol tottered on its pedestal, and an idol leaning askew is a god dethroned.

She bent over a rose and cut it, pricking her finger on a thorn. She laughed at the tiny drop of blood.

"I just hadn't figured on the thorns,"

she told herself philosophically. "I've got to make up my mind that matrimony discounts romance, and let it go at that."

She paused, and looked about her garden.

"When the time's up," she resolved, "I'll tell him that the war is over. Having registered my protest, I'll never mention it again; but I'll make no concession until the time's up. The suspense will do him good!"

She frowned as a sharp little pang assailed her heart, realizing that it cost her nothing, on her side, to hold Dick at such arm's length. She wanted love as much as he did.

Phyllis went on busily snipping at spent blossoms until she heard a sound. She turned to find Lawrence Speed standing near by, holding in his hand a bunch of such flowers as grew in none of her beds or borders.

"These are lady slippers that I found in the woods and gathered for you," he explained. "They're becoming scarce, like the trailing arbutus. They're true orchids, and so lovely that you should have them."

She took them from him, burying her face in their vivid yet delicate bloom. When she resumed her work, he chatted on with an agreeable, restful mingling of wit and triviality.

"You haven't paid the promised visit to my windmill yet," he complained. His eyes lightened with amusement as he added: "But I've had a visitor, as anomalous as a polar bear in Guatemala, or a yak on Broadway."

When she lifted her brows inquiringly, Speed nodded his head portentously and explained:

"A genuine, dyed-in-the-wool old mountaineer from the Blue Ridge or the Cumberlands. I wanted to paint him, and to call the thing 'The Last of the Feudists,' but he haughtily declined to sit."

Phyllis straightened to sudden uprightness, and her smiling face became soberly intent.

"A Kentucky mountaineer down here on Cape Cod!" she exclaimed. "What manner of man was he?"

Speed had said that his gift for portraiture was meager. Possibly with brush and palette it may have been so, but with words he was more the master. Humorously, since he was portraying in a vein of caricature to amuse a pretty woman, he sketched his man, until the elongation of

gaunt figure, the modeling of feature, and even the expression of hawklike eye, struck the girl with an uncanny feeling of seeing once more the old man whose pardon she had secured.

"This guest of mine," the painter told her, "struck me as being mildly demented. He seemed to shrink so sensitively from human associations that I wondered whether he mightn't be a refugee from justice. They aren't rare there, I've been led to believe."

Phyllis felt a sudden weakness in her knees, a swift premonition of actual danger; yet the menace was so improbable, so fantastic, that its half acknowledgment to herself seemed weak and panicky.

The man who chatted on volubly and complacently saw only the parted lips and brightened eyes of a challenged attention. Being interested himself, he found no need of seeking a deeper motive for such quick responsiveness.

"I persuaded him to let me walk with him, though he rather insisted on his hermit isolation," said Speed. "I felt as if old *Leatherstocking* or Daniel Boone had stepped to rebirth out of some yellow-paged book. As I compared myself with him, I saw a new meaning in the words of the Bible, 'which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not.' The extraordinary acuteness of senses trained in the wilderness was a revelation. He must have seen and identified a score of birds that weren't there for me at all until he pointed them out. His ears caught sounds beyond my register, and his nostrils told him more than my sight and hearing combined. He could move through loose brush and dead leaves without a sound. I'm strongly tempted to believe he could have made himself invisible if he had wished."

"Did he tell you his name?" inquired the young woman.

Speed threw back his head and laughed.

"For that practical sense which sticks pins into the bubble of romance," he exclaimed, "recommend me to a woman! No, I didn't even ask him his name. To me his name was *Leatherstocking the Second*. I was back for one day in a story-book world, being a boy all over again, and one can't do that often."

"Did he talk at all? Did he say why he had come?"

Phyllis put her questions persistently, and the man from the windmill shook his head.

"He talked a little, of course—chiefly about how flat the country was here, and how it made him feel naked. He said that God's lofty temple had been cast down under human feet, or words to that effect. Oh, yes—he seemed deeply religious, patriarchally devout, and homesick."

"Why had he come so far away from home?"

"As to that he was hardly convincing. I gathered that the *wanderlust* had seized him late in life, and that he was taking it hard. He intimated that he had seen enough to know he didn't require to see it, after all."

Phyllis stood biting at the stem of a rose, and her fingers were hardly steady, but she controlled their tremulousness.

"Contrast is the backbone of drama," moralized her visitor. "Here at sea level and on current date—mark you, he had never seen salt water until this trip—his old lips fell into phrases that must have been handed down from sea-roving ancestors by word of mouth. His phrases were like old coins rubbed with generations of thumbing and minted with obsolete designs. He called it the 'ocean sea,' and that's what Walter Raleigh called it in the reign of Gloriana." Speed paused, and then added: "His face was quiet, his words courteous and soft, his step as light as a cat's. By Jove, he might be standing within five yards of us now, and we should never know it unless he wanted us to know it!"

Phyllis started and looked around. Again Speed laughed.

"Don't be startled," he urged; "though it's a compliment to the graphic color of my narrative. If he's a killer from ambush, I dare say he's off duty up here. He's a cock away from his own pit. If I can get hold of him again, I'm going to try to lure him over. I think both you and your husband would delight in him. The antique shops of Cape Cod are places of faded glory and of modern reproductions, but my human antique is authentic."

Phyllis had forced an amused smile, but Speed's description had dovetailed and pieced together until her first intuition, dismissed as unreasonably fantastic, had come back, reinforced and terrifying. She saw once more the keen face and the intense eyes into which she had looked when Lloyd Powell wore the striped garb of the convict. She envisioned again the zealot's inflexible will, and the gratitude with which

he thanked her for her promise of intercession, even when that promise bore little prospect of success.

Her husband's words of that afternoon came back to her, too. Lloyd might have known the contents of the telegram even while his face told nothing, as he stood by the rostrum where the lawyer who had sent him to prison presided as judge. Having read it, he might have waited for no other call than that of his own heart—and his heart was capable of construing either hate or love in terms of the ultimate.

Joe Carson had spoken of the unabated fire that burns in mountain blood—the "borrowed fire" that is not suffered to expire. It might be burning now in old Lloyd to some perverted end.

If this man who answered so exactly to the description of Lloyd Powell had made that long pilgrimage in the twilight of his life, she could think of only two possible reasons for its undertaking. Either he had come to see her, to thank her, and to wish her well, or he had come to redress her fancied wrongs. If the former was his purpose, her house would be the spot to which he would logically and at once have turned his weary feet. If it was the second, he would come with the noiseless approach of the man who hides in the laurel, and with that furtive quietness which had so much impressed the gentleman who now stood chatting about him as a human curiosity.

Working under the goad of a fear which was mounting to panic, her thoughts raced fast. The very quixotic lunacy which might be urging him, if her fears were justified, would keep him away from her—until the deed was done. He would wish to liberate her without involving her. A terrible possibility began to strengthen and solidify into a hideous probability.

She sought to hold control of her conjectures, however, and to keep in touch with reason; so she continued to smile on Speed and to prompt his light volubility, drawing from it, wherever she could, some cogent thread of certainty.

"Wait!" he exclaimed at last. "I'll draw you a bit of a sketch of the fellow. I'm not sure I shan't try to do an oil study of him from memory. Those rugged features, and the dashes of high color in the flesh tones—the hawklike eyes—the fine bone values—my word, there'd be character in it!"

He had taken out a pocket sketch pad,

as he talked, and was working away with feverishly enthusiastic strokes of his pencil.

Though he was no painter of distinction, Speed had the flair of the caricaturist. Eccentricities he overstressed, but the spirit and the essential he caught. When at length he smilingly handed Phyllis the sketch he had made, she had to bite her lips and hold hard to her self-control, for the face that looked out was unmistakable. Into the cleverly drawn eyes, under their shaggy brows, the draftsman had put, without appraising it, the intense light of a fanatical purpose—a purpose which would count no cost in martyrdom.

Holding the thing before her, Phyllis trembled, and braced herself against a wave of unnerving agitation. Once more she forced a laugh. She must get rid of this man and find Lloyd Powell. It must be done to-day, because to-morrow might be too late.

Only a few hours ago she and Dick had laughed together—they who had laughed together so little of late—over the ridiculous idea of a Kentucky clansman coming down East to avenge her. Now, unless she could avert the thing in time, the jest of a few hours ago might become a monstrous reality. But she must hide those fears for a while yet.

"Give me that portrait, please," she begged.

Speed bowed ceremoniously.

"It is yours," he declared. "The other, in oil, even if it has to be done from memory, is an idea that grows on me."

"No, no!" she exclaimed abruptly. Realizing that she had spoken with too much feeling, she altered her tone to a shallower timbre. "Let this be the only one. Let the mold be broken. This is the thing dashed off in the moment of inspiration. Don't spoil it with duplication!"

Speed laughed with his booming good nature.

"So be it," he acceded. "It's an artistic sacrifice, but one made in a good cause."

"And"—Phyllis found herself speaking a shade breathlessly—"don't speak of your mountain man to Dick, until you can capture him and bring him in person. Let's hold him as a surprise in the flesh." She paused. "Dick has some connections who are from the Kentucky mountains, you see," she added, as if she felt the need of some more logical explanation.

"So be it again," assented the visitor

genially. "I shall mute my harp until I can get service on a *subpoena duces tecum* and bring my mountain to Mohammed—which, though I say it myself, is a mixed metaphor of versatile merit."

He waved his hand, and Phyllis watched him stride away. It seemed to her that her garden, with all its color, was as confused as the jumble of a kaleidoscope, and that it was reeling and spinning giddily about her.

She looked at the sketch that she held in her hand and thrust it, crumpled, into the bosom of her dress.

XXI

Dick had gone away in the car that afternoon, and Phyllis had decided to stay at home. It was close to sunset as Lawrence Speed took his leisurely departure, and no time was to be lost. If Lloyd Powell were here, she must find him, and find him soon. A brain that worked along deep grooves of single-minded dedication would not squander time in temporizing, and tomorrow might be too late.

The menace of the mountaineer's presence was either pure fantasy or a thing of imminent and undeniable doom.

The sun had set, and twilight was closing in with a lemon strip of afterglow across the west, when she gave up her quest and turned homeward, exhausted and discouraged almost to lethargy. As she came, stumbling with weariness, to the woods that edged her own place, she stopped abruptly, halted by a terrifying sight—or was it an apparition?

Whether it was actual vision or the fabrication of overwrought nerves, she could have sworn that she saw, standing at the shadowed margin of the woods, the gaunt figure of a man, statuesquely upright and immovable, with eyes set on the house and a rifle cradled within a bent elbow.

Phyllis shouted the name of Lloyd Powell. She ran stumblingly to the spot, and called and called again. She thrashed about through brier and bayberry, but the vision had dissolved.

With a hammering, sick heart she went back to the house. Dick had not yet returned, and she met no one as she slipped hurriedly through the entry and mounted the stairs. Gaining her own room, she switched on the light, and was about to ring for Martha, when a glimpse of the picture that her pier glass gave back to her

brought her to a halt, rigid and startled. As by a lightning flash, she saw that her pupils were distended and abnormally lit, and that her breast was tumultuously unsteady. Her silk sport skirt and blouse, which had come fresh from her trousseau wardrobe, were brier-torn and bedraggled. One white silk stocking was rent by thorns and stained with blood from a scratched ankle. Her heavy hair was disordered, and her face unnaturally pale.

She had started her random search for the mysterious pilgrim whose presence spelled such menace—unless she could see and deter him—with the steady morale of determination. As the search continued without result, that morale had weakened. At its end she had been running here and there in haphazard fright, until one of two things seemed true, and either was sufficiently terrifying. Either she had become so distracted that her mind had given way to the hallucination of seeing specters, or else her dread had been confirmed by an actual glimpse of a rifle-armed sentinel who paid no heed to her supplications.

Now she was back again with her problem unsolved. Until she succeeded in gaining some sort of command over her jumping nerves, until she restored some vestige of composure to her shaken hearing, she dared not meet the scrutiny of either Kayami or Martha.

So she closed and bolted her door and stripped herself of the clothing that bore such telltale marks of her panic. She bathed her face in cold water, and taxed her reserves of self-command, until the portrait which the glass gave honestly back assured her that she could safely ring for her maid.

Her torn and stained garments she had thrust carefully out of sight, but her fingers still trembled a little, and her faculties had not recovered their normal functions. She did not notice that there had fallen to the floor from its place in the bosom of her blouse a sheet of crumpled drawing paper, bearing a hasty but clever bit of recognizable portraiture. It lay unnoticed where chance had placed it, just at the edge of her waste paper basket.

To the uncritical eye she was herself again, rehabilitated in the serenity of bearing that gave a regal touch to her beauty. As she was about to leave her room, she remembered the sketch, and made a hasty search for it—which proved futile. Mar-

tha was with her now, and of necessity she curbed the keenness of her anxiety.

She heard Dick's step below in the living room. From now on she must be with him as a constant sentry over his safety. Until this danger was averted, the need of being at his side was paramount. After all, the pencil portrait must be somewhere here in her own room, and it was unlikely that any one would disturb it until she had time to find it.

She gave herself a brief and final inspection in the glass, assured herself that her appearance did not betray her deep anxiety, and went down. Through dinner a fevered sort of animation gave her conversation a staccato tone. Carson, glancing keenly at her, noticed that her color was unwontedly heightened. Guided by the wish to think so, he argued that she had come to the excitement of realizing love anew, and his own pulses quickened.

Somehow Phyllis felt an overwhelming dread of the coming night. If she could stave off disaster until the morrow, she would take the car and rake the neighborhood until she had found Lloyd Powell, and had assured him that the service he contemplated would be an unspeakable cruelty to her. A word from her would be enough; but before it could be spoken, the old Kentuckian must be found.

She caught herself nervously watching the open window, and shuddering as she recalled stories of men called to mountain doorways at night, and shot down as they stood limned against the yellow glow of lamplight within. She remembered that many log houses there had no windows, because windows offer the assassin too ready an opportunity. This wasn't the mountains, but there was some line that Speed had quoted about the mountain coming to Mohammed. She wanted to shriek in hysteria, yet she succeeded in talking on almost calmly.

When the meal ended, the moon had ridden high, and Dick Carson strolled over to the mantel and filled his pipe. His wife, almost without realization of her action, came quickly to her feet and moved too, hovering like a slender bulwark between his body and the open door.

Then Kayami called her to the pantry for some household consultation. When she returned, she looked about almost wildly for Dick. He had stepped out upon the terrace. With the winged speed of terror

she pursued him as if he were a sleepwalker wandering toward the brink of a lofty precipice.

The whole thing was grotesque, unspeakably absurd, this dread of ambush and violence, here on the quiet shores of Cape Cod! She told herself that over and over again, but she found no comfort in the refrain.

Out on the clipped grass of the lawn, Dick was walking slowly toward the edge of the woods, nearing the exact spot where she had seen, or imagined, the gun-bearing figure an hour and a half ago. In the silver light his white flannels made him as conspicuous as a man of snow. With a stifled shriek the girl rushed toward him, and caught his arm, interposing herself between him and the black curtain of massed pine trees beyond.

"Come back into the house, Dick!" she exclaimed, in a voice that was tremulous with pleading.

The man halted in amazement.

"You didn't hear bad news over the phone, did you, Phyllis?" he inquired.

"No, no!" she cried.

Then, suddenly aware of her hysterical manner and inexplicable bearing, she forced a laugh and laid her hand on his arm. Surely, were this strange assassin ambushed there, the sight of her in a pose of such affection toward her husband would stay his finger on the trigger.

"No," she replied. "I want to talk to you, Dick. Come inside, and I'll explain."

Even now she spoke breathlessly. The man turned to face her, which made it necessary for her to shift her position quickly, in order to bring herself again between him and the possibility of ambush.

"Explain here, Phyllis," he urged. A sudden throb of joyousness leaped in his voice. "Where can we have a better place than here, overlooking the sea, in the moonlight?"

His pulses seemed to hold currents of quicksilver. She could only mean that she was ready to declare an end to warfare and proclaim a return to love. With his hand on her arm, he led her gently forward toward the smudge of shadow that masked the woods, while they themselves stood in a brightness of blue and silver.

It was while they were still at the table that Lloyd Powell had slipped his rifle from its place of concealment in the ramshackle

barn of his temporary abode and started on his journey, holding warily to the tangle of pine woods, every foot of which he had reconnoitered, and every path through which he now knew.

When dark fell, he stood upon a soundless carpet of pine needles, behind a barrier of shoulder-high bayberry bushes, looking down on the Carson house. Strangely enough for such a mission, he knelt there for a moment in prayer. Then he rose, cocked his rifle, and waited.

His eyes held no killing hate, but the patient resignation of one who quietly faces an ordeal. Two men were going to die—Carson by his hand, and he himself, in due season, by the hand of the law's executioner. Powell would have preferred to reverse matters, so that he might have had the easier dispatching of a clean bullet; but the choice did not lie with him.

He waited, and it seemed to him a long while before he saw Dick Carson emerge from the house. A few moments later he saw Dick joined by Phyllis. They were approaching him, and his forefinger nursed the trigger.

"Where can we have a better place than here," repeated Carson in a low voice, "overlooking the sea, in the moonlight?"

He was hungry to take his bride in his arms and renew the raptures that had been interrupted a few days ago. He wanted to hear her say, as she had said in other times:

"You and I, Dick—always, you and I!"

But as yet he held his arms rigid at his sides, because she had not yet spoken the word that would release him from his pledge of abstinence. That word must surely be coming now, or Phyllis would not be standing so, clinging to his arm, trembling through her whole body.

Carson waited, and a short silence hung between them. Then he heard the girl whisper:

"Listen! I heard a rustle in the bushes."

He laughed.

"It's only the wind," he declared almost impatiently.

"There's no wind to-night—not a breath," she said.

"Suppose it is some one, dearest," he protested. "After all, we needn't care. We're married, you know."

She was rigid, with her head bent, listening. Her eyes turned, searching the shadowy woods.

His gaze was fixed on her face. He did not see, as she did, a shadow deeper than the rest stirring ominously in the stillness of the background. She saw, too, the faintest glint of a vagrant needle of moonlight on metal.

She was acting for that invisible audience of one which she knew the darkness held, and not at all for the man beside her. She flung herself passionately on her husband's breast, threw her arms about his neck, and clung there between him and the woods. She raised her voice, so that it must be heard by ears more distant than his own.

"I love you, Dick!" she cried. "With all my heart I love you. Whoever is your enemy is my enemy, and whoever serves me must serve you too!"

It might have struck Carson at any other time that these were strange and stilted words, but now he could think only of the surprising confession they conveyed, and his hungry arms closed around her.

Back in the sooty duskiness of the jagged pine trees, where stiff-stemmed bayberry lifted its waxy leafage breast high, there loomed a deep cavern of darkness and silence. Standing in that seeming void, an unseen human figure remained for a fraction of a second as motionless as if its life had been suspended.

For a pulseless moment all living breath seemed hated. The moonlight lay radiant as platinum, and the shadows slept in cobalt depth, while even the fragrances of the summer night hung unstirring and currentless—and death waited. Only the restive whisper of distant surf expressed itself in sound.

Upon Lloyd Powell rested a paralysis of wonder, of deliverance, of joy. He had come to slay and to give his own life for that which he took. Now, when he stood in his character of doom, with the instrument of death raised, as Abraham's knife had been raised over his son Isaac in sacrifice, suddenly and amazingly the God whom he believed himself to be serving had caught and stayed his hand.

Had the voice from on high spoken to him in thunder out of the heavens it could have seemed to him to come in no more direct or commanding intervention. The cup that he had schooled his heart to drain had been mercifully snatched from his lips. The woman whom he had steeled his soul to serve had declared a love which forbade his service.

Old Lloyd, the stoic, was for once shaken to the foundations of his soul. He was smitten with the spiritual palsy of one unexpectedly released from the hard exactions of martyrdom. The lifted rifle came slowly down in hands so tremulous that the quivering forefinger of one of them scarcely missed pressing, in sheer nervousness, the trigger that it had thought to press in stern resolution.

The life habit of caution and the ingrained wariness of woodcraft were swept from him. For once his catlike foot failed of noiselessness as he turned away to leave the spot, and he almost stumbled when he stepped boldly out of his concealment and went along the margin where light and shadow met.

Carson must have heard that going, had he had ears just then for any sound but the happy echoes of the words that had just come to them. To his ears, too, Phyllis's words had come like thunder from the heavens, drowning all else—a thunder that blasted down the glacial barriers between himself and paradise. He would have heeded no other sound had he heard it, would have seen no other sight than the face of the woman so close to his own that her hair brushed his cheek.

But she, terror-stricken, with every nerve sensitive and straining, did hear it, and saw the lean figure moving away until it had turned once more and been submerged in the shadows. In her stress of agitation she did not consider the possibility of the old man's stopping or returning. She thought of him as definitely gone.

She had lied in time. She had averted catastrophe. She had caught back the sweep of tragedy in the very rush of its launching. Death had grazed her husband, but she believed the danger had passed, and with a bursting heart and an almost swooning torpor of shock she lay limp in her husband's arms.

Yet Powell had not gone far—not so far as took him beyond the reach of rifle touch. Unseen again, because the shadow had blotted him out, the old man was down on his knees, with his gun lying on the pine needles at his side.

He was on his knees with his long, leather-thewed body racked in a silent paroxysm of emotion that shook him like dry and unuttered sobs. He was doing what he had never done before in his long life of iron travail—weeping inwardly, while he

poured out his soul in a voiceless incoherence of prayer. He was pouring it out in a thanksgiving so poignant that it was an agony, since to him the edict that had stayed him savored of miracle.

His body rocked. His seamed features writhed in a zeal like the hysteria one sees in backwoods revivals, when repentant sinners "come through" to the mourner's bench. It was like that except for its silence, for the exaltation of his soul seemed too tremendous for sound. It was inward and almost voiceless. With his bony fingers gripping his bony face, even Phyllis did not hear him.

Phyllis was still resting, nerveless and hardly more than half conscious, against the breast of her husband, whose arms were hungrily locked about her. His voice, momentarily stricken dumb by happiness, had come back to him; but the fiery eloquence of his emotion outrushed coherence, and his utterance, barbaric as a pæan, came to her with imperfect realization.

She had been an actress improvising her part as she played it, and the task had drained her powers dry. Her theme had been pregnant with the imminence of tragedy, and her stage had been that of life and death. With the moon for a spotlight, she had played to her audience—a single simple-minded man who saw duty in assassination. She had striven to halt him, and she had succeeded.

Now she thought of the ghastly mummery as ended, of the curtain as dropped, of the audience as gone. She heard in her ears the flow of words that were proclamations of love for her husband, and violently, uncontrollably, the shallow hypocrisy of the situation flooded her with wave upon wave of revulsion.

She had lied and dissembled to meet a desperate need. The need was over. The dissimulation must end.

Blindly and passionately, now that her lie had served its end, she burned to speak the truth. She felt about her that tight grasp of possessive love to which a woman can yield herself only in the pride of responsive eagerness or with a shriveling of shame. It was scalding and hurting her, and in her heart there was no answering emotion, but only repulsion.

"It has been an eternity, dearest," Dick Carson was declaring; "but the end is worth it all. Never again will there be doubt, never again uncertainty. We've

been through the acid test, and love has survived!"

XXII

PHYLLIS CARSON was not quite sane. The shattering stress of that day had eaten into her reason like a burning acid. A few minutes ago life had held only the supreme need to play a part convincingly. Now the one need left seemed that of bursting through the mesh of lies with which she had bound her soul. She must make her repudiation articulate, and yet she could only gasp weakly:

"No, no! You don't understand. Let me go!"

"I'll never let you go again while there's life in me," declared the husband, with the triumphant ring of victory in his voice. "Now, for the first time, life is full of glory. Now love comes into its own!"

He was almost crushing her in arms, which, for all their tenderness, were greedy too. He was a famished man, drinking deep of long-denied love, and his arteries glowed to an intoxication of spirit. Dick Carson was drunk—drunk with the sudden attainment of all that he had been starving for and despairing of. In the throb of his voice, unknown to himself, sounded the elation of the conquering male, as primal and as nakedly frank as might have sounded from the throat of a savage.

"Our mistake was the idea that we had two separate lives to live," he rushed on. "Now they are merged, and there's no mistake left—no chance of mistake. Till death shall part us, you and I are one—to live together as one flesh—to have no separate existences!"

He paused in the tumult of his words, and his breath came with an exultant feverishness that seemed to scald her. She sought to protest, to explain, but he crushed her words into silence with lips that met her lips and clung to them until she felt as if her spirit was a heady wine which he was draining to satisfy his own thirst.

"We were married," he went on tempestuously, "because for me there was no other woman in the world, and for you no other man. God destined each of us for the other. It was written back in the beginning of things, when the world was fluid and young. A nightmare that had no real substance threatened to poison our love, but it couldn't last—I knew it couldn't last!"

She sought gently to press him away, but he only talked on with mounting ardor.

"I knew that when you gave your love, you gave it for life. I knew you might struggle and deny, but that in the end you'd give yourself back to me—wholly, proudly, without reserve!"

She was gasping convulsively for breath. Back in the shadows the old man from Kentucky was still praying.

She tried to answer, but it was like whistling against a hurricane, and the words died in her throat.

"Marriage!" he exclaimed. "Marriage is only a formula of civilization. We are more than married—we are lovers to the end of our days. All that's finest in friendship is ours, kindled into flame by the fire of love that mates us in mind and body, in prayer and passion. I knew that you'd come back to me, because my love couldn't be denied. I knew it must compel your love, and bring it home again!"

The positive incandescence of his emotions choked his words. Resolutely Phyllis braced herself in her effort to stem the tidal flow; but her lips were inert and her throat dry, and sound still seemed beyond her power of volition.

"There could be no middle ground for you," he exulted. "You might hesitate for a while, but when the truth broke through the mists you came back, prouder in surrender than in victory. Love needs its occasional storm, and ours had been too calm. We had never had a lovers' quarrel before. I knew I hadn't lost you. I knew that when you came back to me, you'd come gloriously!"

Dick Carson, too, was not quite sane. In his eyes, as the moonlight caught them, gleamed the fire of passion. To the woman, struggling to be heard, and failing, it seemed the selfish arrogance of the conquering male. Into it she read the same affronting egotism which makes the cock pheasant strut and the turkey gobbler distend and redden his wattles. From that supreme insolence of masculine conquest she recoiled with a sickened heart.

Dick was mad with the touch of her softness against him, the hammering of her heart against his breast, the warmth and fragrance of her contact; and she must end it here and now.

A wave of returning strength at last answered her need. She leaned far back, straining away from him.

"For God's sake," she pleaded, "let me go! You're killing me!"

The man slackened his hold, and Phyllis recoiled away from him.

"Come indoors," she begged. "Come into the house. You don't understand. I've got to talk to you!"

"Why not here?" he urged once more, still blinded by passion. "Why not here, where God has set the stage under the moonlit sky? All night we can talk indoors—afterward."

"You don't understand," she reiterated. Her voice was faint and gasping, so that it did not carry far—not as far as the shadows where the old mountaineer prayed in thanksgiving. "You don't understand." She forced out the words desperately. "When I told you that I loved you, I lied. I had to lie. I must explain—but not here."

He was standing an arm's length away from her in the moonlight, still unsteady by the hurricane sweep of his emotion. His mind was too intoxicated to digest calmly or fully the meaning that lay in mere words; but the two words "I lied" broke through to his mind as shells may break through concrete and stone defenses. He did not quite understand, but he was halted in the tumult of his passions as a hurricane-blown tree may be brought up against a precipice.

"You lied?" he repeated in a dazed voice. He laughed incredulously. "You're excited, dearest," he protested reassuringly. "We're both excited. Our feet aren't on solid ground just now. We're walking on the stars."

"I'm not walking on stars," she denied impetuously. "I lied to you. I had to lie, because of danger that you don't know about. I didn't mean it. I don't love you. I can't ever love you, Dick!"

"Can't love me?"

His voice, which had been so keenly vibrant, was flat and toneless. At last her meaning had broken intelligently on him. No longer could it be swept aside, yet no more could it be accepted or understood. If words meant anything, he had just had her surrender, unconditional and willing.

For a bewildered moment he stood dumb, and his face in the pale light was ghostly. He had not yet wholly grasped her meaning, but it had brushed against his consciousness, and he reeled on the brink of utter madness.

"What do you mean?" he demanded at last, in a low, shaking voice. "What does any declaration of love from you mean, if it's going to be sworn and forsworn at will? My God, Phyllis, answer me—what do you mean?"

Phyllis made a supreme and exhausting effort at self-command.

"I'm going to explain to you, Dick," she answered steadily; "but not now—not here. I just don't love you. I can't ever love you again."

"But the words are still warm on your lips!"

"Not now, Dick—not here," she reiterated beseechingly.

With a sudden upflaring of demoniac fury he caught her wrist and swung her close.

"Yes, by God!" he exclaimed. "Here and now! I'm done with backing and filling. I'm done with being played with. My life isn't a damned daisy, to be pulled to pieces, petal by petal, with 'loves me—loves me not.' Tell me the decent truth, once and for all. In God's name, what do you mean?"

She met his wild eyes and repeated slowly, faintly:

"Just that—just what I said. I can't help it."

From the man's throat broke a moan that was agonized and low. In his temples the pulses beat painfully, and before his eyes swam spots of giddy passion. He drew Phyllis close again, crushing her struggles into impotence as he strained her to him. His voice and his mood were those of savage coercion.

"Very well, then!" he said. "I've played fair, and you've bilked me. You've raised me up to happiness only for the pleasure of pitching me down. Now you can be my willing wife or not, as you choose; but you belong to me, and I hereby take possession of you!"

"Let me go!" she warned desperately, but he only strained her to him more tightly.

"You're my woman," he told her. "I've fought honestly for your soul, and you've played disreputably with mine. I don't know why I want you, but I do, and now I take you as my prize of war. You've made a sport of my love. Now you can pay the price!"

"Let me go!" she almost screamed. "Let me go!"

She struggled desperately, hammering frantically and futilely with her clenched fists against his arms, his shoulders, and his face.

"You beast!" she screamed again. "Let me go!"

Lloyd Powell, still on his knees, had not yet finished his prayer. The first tempestuous paroxysm of his agitation had passed into a more tranquil spirit of praise. His lips were making no sounds, but at least they were shaping words.

"I praise Thee, Almighty God, out of an overflowin' heart, fer makin' hit manifest ter me betimes that I'd done erred!"

He paused. To his ears there came something like a low scream.

Startled, dumfounded, he opened the lids that had been closed, and moved the hands that had covered his face. He saw Phyllis struggling in Dick Carson's grasp, beating vainly at the man who held her. He heard her terrified, wrathful words, and he read on her face an expression which he could not mistake.

For a moment the old man remained immovable on his knees, enthralled by bewilderment. For a moment his reeling senses failed to grasp the idea that the bitter task from which he had just been freed had re-

turned to him, a hundred times more trying, because he had loosened his nerves from the fixity of his resolve.

Then, as he saw the woman struggling, the spirit that had softened in him solidified again to granite.

There was one more instant of protest, of agony. A wailing moan broke from his throat, like that of a wild animal mortally hurt—a strange and self-betraying outcry for a man trained to the usages and secrecies of war by ambuscade.

Then his hand stole out. Once more the rifle came up, and the thumb "roostered" its hammer. Once more the forefinger slipped into the trigger guard, and, still kneeling in his posture of prayer, the butt plate settled to his shoulder.

Phyllis and her husband stood in the radiant moonlight like figures spotlighted as the center of a stage. Lloyd Powell could see the left breast of the man in white flannels, just clear of the eclipsing figure of the wife whom he was holding an unwilling captive.

It was a matter of two seconds from the beginning of the tableau until its end; and it ended in a white spurt of flame from the shadow and a clean crack of rifle fire through the pines.

(To be continued in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

THE LAST SONG

TIME runs apace,
I have few hours to spare;
Therefore I sing up yonder to her face
Throned in the air—
My last song to my star,
Dreaming my words may reach her at the last,
In her bright place.

Alas, I fear that all my longing vast
Will not avail to bridge yon gleaming space
Where she in glory hides
And so serenely bides,
Lost in the roar of planets! My poor song
Is vain, in vain my earthly prayers prolong.

And yet who knows
But she may one day hear,
And from her snow-white bosom cast a rose,
Falling from sphere to sphere,
Making from her its heavenly pathway sweet,
To fall in consolation vast
Here at my feet?

Guido Pennisi

Behind the Dam

THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE AND REAPPEARANCE OF SAUL AND DAVID ROBINSON

By Matthew Benson

SAUL and David Robinson disappeared between two days. At evening, as the fiery sun went down in a red-hot July sky, they were puttering about their farmyard, finishing the rag end of their chores. In the morning they were gone.

From my own dwelling, a quarter of a mile down the river, I noticed that the usual smoke of their breakfast fire was missing. I commented upon it as I helped my brother Luke into the wheel chair from which he has been unable to move for the past five years. An hour later, when I heard my uncles' cows bawling in the barn, I trudged over to find out what might be the matter.

There was matter enough, for the house was utterly deserted. The supper dishes still stood upon the kitchen table—the remnants of a slice of ham, congealed in greasy gravy, a few fried potatoes, a hacked loaf of bread. Their chairs were pushed back askew, as if the two men had just left the table.

I hurried on into their bedrooms, thinking they might suddenly have been taken ill, but neither bed had been slept in. They were nowhere in the house, nor in the barn, the stable, or the fields. The two brothers had simply vanished.

We have been considered a peculiar family, for in neither my uncles' house nor in my own has there been a woman since my mother died, eight years ago. Saul and David had lived alone for longer than that—two middle-aged bachelors, Saul two years older than David's fifty-two. They were farmers, as their father and their grandfather had been before them.

Family resemblance was unusually strong in them. In fact, they might have been twins, for both were tall, wiry, and thin, with heavy shocks of graying black hair

and smooth-shaven faces. From the time they were boys their clothes had been interchangeable, and their money was always kept in a joint bank account.

But with physical appearance their likeness abruptly ended. Saul was silent, morose, inclined to sudden bursts of anger. Once he had gone away for a year, to try to better his fortunes, and had come home a wreck, poorer than when he left, and with a slashed scar across his left cheek that he had never explained. David was naturally light-hearted, open-handed, full of laughing pleasantries—the very antithesis of Saul.

It was a wonder that they lived together with so little trouble, for they were not particularly congenial; but they were used to each other, and each in his own way was fond of the farm that had come to them as a joint inheritance.

I milked the cows, fed the horses, and let out the hens before I hurried back to Luke with the strange news.

"Did David"—we have never called either one uncle—"say anything about going away when he was here yesterday?" I asked.

"Not a word," said Luke. "He was joking about my latest attempt to paint, and then he said that he'd soon have the money to send me up to the city for the operation on my legs. Where can they have gone? Can anything have happened to them, Mark?"

The boy was worried, for he had always been a favorite of David's, and the days were few and far between that our uncle did not drop past with a word of cheer for the cripple. For him to go away, even overnight, without some explanation, seemed incredible.

Had it been Saul alone we should not have been surprised, for he seldom came

near us, and then only to criticize my failures and to taunt me for my inability to make enough to send Luke away for the treatment that would let him walk again. It would never have occurred to him to offer, as David had offered, to help us.

I have not been a success. My farm—mine and Luke's, a twenty-acre piece separated from my uncles' place when my mother married—is not big enough to afford more than a bare living, and lack of money has forced me to work it alone and inefficiently. I have had to take care of Luke as well, for a housekeeper has been further beyond my means than a hired man.

"They can't have gone far," I commented, to comfort Luke.

I was uneasy, nevertheless. As the day wore on, and we heard nothing from them, I called up the neighbors, from my uncles' house, to inquire if they had been seen. No one even knew that they were away. The storekeeper in the village told me that he had not seen either one for several days; nor could I trace them from the railroad station, which I called as a last resort.

In other words, though nobody had seen them go, they had vanished as completely as if they had been caught up by a passing airplane.

In the three weeks that followed the whole countryside was searched over a dozen times. One theory after another was advanced, only to be discarded—that they had sunk into a bed of quicksand and had been swallowed up—but there was no quicksand within a hundred miles of us; that they had quarreled, as they often did, and that each, unknown to the other, had gone away—which on the face of it was preposterous; that they had been drowned in the river—but no one knew so well as they where every deep hole lay in the stream, shallow now as the water leaked through the warped wickets of the old dam half a mile below.

Throughout those weeks the mystery of their disappearance was the chief topic of speculation at the post office, and we had more visitors at our house than ever before. Meanwhile I assumed the double burden of the combined farms, and Luke remained in his wheel chair instead of going to the hospital for his operation.

II

It was early in August when Frank Bumpus, the R. F. D. mail man, came

bouncing up our lane in his rattly old car, waving his hand and shouting that he had news for us. I think he had not stopped to deliver any other mail all the way from the post office, though he had evidently called the post card's information to every one he passed, for half a dozen others arrived hot on his heels.

He had only a picture card of the St. Lawrence River, postmarked "Montreal," with four lines scrawled in the correspondence column. The message read:

This is a fine city. Saul has not been very well.—DAVID.

That was all. They were alive—that was something we hadn't been sure of before; but we still had no idea why they had left so secretly, or why they did not come home. It was as if they had gone away for a planned vacation, and were sending a conventional greeting to the family.

Frank scratched his head as I read it aloud.

"Mark," he said to me, "that makes it more of a mystery than it was before."

"Why don't you write them, Mark—or, better still, telegraph," Luke suggested, "and ask when they're coming back?"

"Right!" I agreed.

When I looked again at the card, I found there was no address; so I couldn't write or telegraph. The inquisitive neighbors, shaking their heads, wandered off to their own work, leaving us to solve the puzzle alone if we could.

More than once, in the fortnight that followed, I had reason to wish that Saul and David would come back. Knowing as I did that they depended upon the revenue of their farm, I could not leave their fields uncultivated; so I toiled alternately at their place and at my own, getting in the last crops of hay, milking the cows, sending the cream to market, feeding the horses and hogs and chickens. I kept at it early and late, until I was as thin as a rail, and so tired each night that I could scarcely drag myself in to the preparation of our simple supper.

Luke, too, was growing wan and emaciated from his constant worry. Often, as I stopped in the fields to wipe the sweat that streamed into my eyes, I raised my voice and screamed impotent curses upon my uncles' thoughtless indifference.

And then another post card came from

David, mailed this time from Quebec. This was the message:

Saul died yesterday.—DAVID.

"Now," said Luke, "David will surely come right home!"

But he didn't, and no further word was heard from him.

I got such help as I could then, for the burden was more than I could carry alone. I knew that David wouldn't mind when he finally decided to come home. His inclinations were pretty well stated in a will that I discovered in his old writing desk when I was rummaging about, one evening, in search of anything that might bear upon their disappearance. He had bequeathed his farm to Luke and me, share and share alike. It developed from the will that the farm was his to give—all his; for years before, it was stated, he had bought out Saul's share when the elder brother had gone away on his adventuring. No one had ever known that.

I took care to seal the envelope in which I placed the will and some other private papers, when I carried it to the village bank and had it deposited in my uncles' safety box.

August wore on, and interest in David's continued silence gradually faded away. Everybody was busy with his own affairs.

On Labor Day morning, when I drove past the old house to spend my holiday shocking corn in the north field, a gray-bearded man stepped out and hailed me.

"Mark!" he called sharply.

I pulled up my horses with a jerk, and looked in amazement. It was nobody I had ever seen, I thought.

"What are you doing?" he inquired.

"Who are you?" I countered, though as I asked the question I knew. "David!" I cried, in answer to myself. I jumped down and went over to him with my hands outstretched. "My, but I'm glad to see you back!"

"Glad to be back," he answered briefly.

He was terribly changed—years older, he seemed, though the unaccustomed beard may have had something to do with that. Stooped a bit he was, too, and the old ring was gone from his voice, and the light from his eyes. Whatever he had been doing, I reflected, he had suffered.

He let me do most of the talking—he who had so many things to tell that I wanted to know about. I had fairly to wring

answers to my questions from him. He had caught cold in the train, he said, and his voice hurt him.

Yes, he said, they had suddenly decided to go away. Yes, he supposed it had been unusual, but they had always wanted to see the St. Lawrence country, and they had figured that I would take care of the place. Yes, Saul had been very sick. Yes, he'd buried him in Canada.

He seemed so much broken up over Saul's death that I didn't try to get any details then; but as I drove along I tried to puzzle it out—why David should seem to care so much. I knew there had been no love lost between them before they went away.

I expected, of course, that he would come out to help me when he had changed his clothes; but he didn't. When I found the house closed and locked, as I passed on my way back, I said to myself:

"He's gone over to sit with Luke."

But he hadn't. He hadn't been near Luke. The boy didn't even know he was home again until I told him.

It hurt Luke dreadfully, as days passed, and David still stayed away from him. It wasn't like David to do that.

As a matter of fact, I saw mighty little of him myself. He let me go ahead with my work in his fields without once coming near me, let alone offering to help get in the crops. I was getting rather peevish myself, and it didn't help my feelings when he came out one day with John Griffin, the real estate man from the village, and began stepping off the field where I was digging potatoes.

He practically ignored me then, but when I was on my way home late that afternoon he came out and said:

"Mark, I'm going to sell the place and go away for good." His voice grew even more husky as he added: "I can't bear to stay here without Saul."

I saw red for a minute, and started to flare up in answer. I had been working like a Trojan keeping up his farm while he was away, and he wasn't even offering me day's wages; but I choked back my anger, and drove on without a word. After all, he was my uncle, and it was his farm to do with as he pleased. If he chose to change his whole point of view toward Luke and me, to be stand-offish and nasty where he had been so generous and gentle before, it was his own business, not mine.

But I was sorry for the boy. He had counted so on going to the hospital now that David had come back.

"Never you mind, Luke," I tried to comfort him. "Our own place is doing well this year, and next month we'll have money enough to fix those legs of yours."

"Waiting a little longer isn't going to hurt me much," he replied. "But, Mark, I wish I could understand what's come over David. Do you realize that he hasn't been near me since he came home?"

I shook my head. It was as strange to me as it was to him.

From that day I lost interest in David's place. His corn and onions and potatoes could wait, if they were to go so soon to some one else. His cows could go dry, every one, for all I cared, while I finished the fall work on my own place.

III

It was nearly a week before I saw David again, and then by chance I ran into him one afternoon at the post office. It had been raining for three days—an early equinoctial, with high winds and a driving northeasterly storm that was flooding the roads and fields and delaying me still further in my already overdue work. I was right short in my answers when he spoke.

"Mark," he said, "did you take some personal papers of mine out of the old desk?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that's where they've gone!" he growled. He was all bundled up in a storm coat pulled around his mouth and ears.

"What did you do with them?"

"Put 'em in the bank."

"You did!" He seemed surprised.

"What for?"

"To keep 'em safe."

"They were all right at home."

"See here!" I snapped. "I've done the best I could with your things while you've been away. Those papers are a darned sight better off in your safe-deposit box than they would have been where any Tom, Dick, or Harry could find them."

"In my box, you say?"

"Yes—in your own box."

"Then that's all right. I'll get them to-morrow."

With that he turned and walked away. I stood looking after him, with the mad rising again inside me. No thanks for anything! I wished I had let his things go to

rack and ruin as he left them. That David should treat me like that was too much.

It was dusk when I reached home, and I was tired from plowing through the mud and buffeting the wind and rain, but not too weary to rush right out again to investigate the disquieting word with which Luke greeted me.

"Mark," he said, all excitement, "I've been sitting over by the east window all afternoon, and do you know that the river's coming up at a fearful rate? It's already worse than last spring's freshet, and still rising."

Even in the half light I could see that he was right. When I clumped heavily across the fields, my boots picking up great gobs of mud, I found my pet field of potatoes already half inundated. I was counting on them to pay for Luke's operation, but if they got water-soaked they wouldn't be worth digging at all.

"It's the dam that's making the trouble!" I shouted into the gale.

I tramped on down that way, to see if I couldn't do something. Years ago my grandfather built a tidewater dam at the lower end of his property, partly to keep the high tides from sweeping in to ruin his best land with its alkaline deposits, partly to retain the irrigating value of the fresh water as it flowed down from its sources in the ice ponds to the north of us. The simplest sort of weir would have been sufficient for his purpose, it has always seemed to me, but instead he constructed an elaborate shutter dam. Through the years that have passed the gates have become so cranky in their handling that only Saul and David have thoroughly understood their operation.

A lantern was flickering on the other side when I got there, and I saw Fred Austin, who has the farm across the river from us, futilely trying to turn the old wickets so that the flood could go through faster. I hailed him, and took hold on my side, but the rush of water was so great that we couldn't budge the things.

"No use!" I called at length, exhausted. "It takes a knack—a trick of turning them—to open the shutters."

We gave up and stood watching the two-foot-deep flood as it belled over the top.

"Two of the ice pond dams up Rochester way are out," Fred hollered. "That's what's made it rise so fast. They telephoned me this afternoon."

"Well," I answered, "there's nothing we can do to-night. If things aren't better by daylight, we'll get David to open the dam. He can do it."

I trudged wearily back to supper; but somehow I couldn't sleep even after I went to bed. The wind was howling, the rain was slashing at the windows, and I could hear the roar of the flood on the river—washing out my potatoes, ruining poor Luke's chances of walking for another year.

At something past midnight I got up, dressed, and went out again. From the place where my feet slogged into the running water I knew that the river was higher than it had been at dusk. I stood still for a moment, with my face turned up toward the streaming sky, and said aloud a little prayer for help.

Across the widening flood another lantern kept pace with my own. I knew that Fred was out, too; but when I attempted to shout to him my voice was swept away by the wind, so we simply waved our lights in a signal that each understood, and went back home to wait for daylight.

IV

I COULD not go to bed again, so I just sat and dozed before the kitchen fire until the first faint glimmer came through the dripping clouds at the east. Then I got into my wet coat again and headed right over to David's.

Fred and two other neighbors from up the river on his side came in from the road as I got there. Together we pounded and shouted until at length my uncle came grumpily to the door, pulling on his trousers. As we stamped inside, streaming water like so many fountains, he growled:

"Well, what do you want? This is a devil of a time to get a man out of bed!"

I looked at him for a moment in amazement and disgust.

"David," I said, "you've got to come down to the dam and open the shutters. The river's on a rampage, and we'll all be ruined!"

"Do it yourself," he returned. "I can't go out in this storm."

"We can't do it. We've tried, but you know well enough you're the only man that knows the trick."

"I won't go out."

"Rain won't hurt you," Fred interjected. "We've been out all night. Don't be a fool, David! You'll lose your own crops."

"Let 'em go," David snapped. "I won't do it."

"David," I pleaded, changing my tone, "what's come over you? It's not like you to be deliberately mean. I'm counting on my potatoes to pay for Luke's operation, and they're being ruined. Come on!"

But he just shook his head. We stood there, begging, arguing, while the windows rattled in the storm, and we knew that every minute was costing us money that we'd slaved for all summer.

At last Fred turned away in disgust.

"I went to school with you and Saul, David," he said. "I used to think you were the more decent of the two, but damned if I don't believe now that it was a shame he died and you were left! Even Saul would have been a better neighbor than you."

For a moment I thought David was going to strike him; but he didn't. He flung the door open to the storm, and rasped out:

"Go to hell!"

As the last of us filed past him, he slammed the door at our backs and shot the bolt.

Disconsolately we stood for a moment in the shelter of the eaves, and then we started back across the fields. I broke the storm-swept silence as we neared my barn.

"There's just one thing now—dynamite," I declared. "I've got some left from blowing stumps. We'll take that and blow out the dam!"

We were all expert enough, as farmers are, in handling the dangerous stuff, and four sticks, placed between the heavy uprights at the sides of the dam and their masonry supports, quickly did the business. There was a rumble, a roar, a crash, and grandfather's old dam flew high into the air with a geyser of water, while the torrent, released from its bondage, tumbled past in a mighty, murky cataract.

Coming from the shelter we had sought, we gathered by the jagged hole that had been torn in the bank, and gloatingly watched the height of the flood pass on its way to sea. We could see it go down and down.

Suddenly Fred let out a startled cry.

"What's that?" he shouted, pointing to a long, brown, sunken log, as it seemed to be, that was jerkily lurching down with the tide.

Rolling from side to side, it was borne slowly on toward us, now lifting a bit, now

stopping to swing back and forth, as if caught by some obstruction, then releasing itself, to glide on again as the river hurtled over it.

Idly, but curiously fascinated, we watched the thing, wondering what it might be, until it came so near that as it turned completely over I knew it for what it really was.

"It's a man!" I screamed. "Look at his head!"

On, on it came, deliberately tumbling over and over, jerkily hesitating, then leaping toward us once again. A man! Who could it be?

I scrambled down the bank, and, standing waist deep in the river, reached out and grasped the thing with shuddering fingers as it swept near me. Then, as I pulled it toward shore, I knew why it had come so slowly in the racing flood.

Around the neck was a short length of rope. Fastened to the other end was a rock three times as big as the man's head.

V

EVEN then we did not sense the meaning of it all, as we dragged the body out upon the bank. Our first concern was the identity of the man; but it was a practically unrecognizable object that lay before us. Obviously it had been in the water for a long time—months, at least. The face was bloated and sodden, hacked and bruised by contact with the river's stones and stumps. The clothes, or what was left of them, were rough, with the coat bulgingly buttoned over the chest.

For some minutes we hesitated to touch it. Then Fred leaned over and began to go through the outer pockets. He found only a pipe and the disintegrating remnants of a tobacco pouch. He laid them on the ground as he undid the buttons. Then, with a sudden cry, he leaped back to his feet.

The handle of a knife was sticking out above the dead man's heart.

"Murdered!" I gasped, although we should have known before. "Who can it be? Who has disappeared from around here?"

Released from the tight clasp of the coat buttons, the knife wobbled and fell out. Fred dropped to his knees again, and began fumbling in the inside pockets. From one he brought out a pulpy mass of papers, from which all writing had long since been

washed away. In the other he found a handkerchief, soaked, discolored, but still bearing on one corner a name in indelible ink that had withstood the water. We crowded closer to decipher it.

"Saul Robinson," we read.

My uncle—murdered! I recognized his coat now, and his pipe—I had seen them a thousand times. I recognized the knife, too—it was David's carver; I knew its worn bone handle.

Then, suddenly, the whole inexplicable mystery of the summer became clear to me, and I knew why the two brothers had disappeared between two days, why Saul's death "in Canada" had never been wholly explained, why David had been so unlike himself since his return, why he now wished to sell his farm and get away again. I knew—he had killed his brother Saul!

"What shall we do?" I asked.

"Do?" Fred replied harshly. "Go after David 'fore he gets away again."

"Yes," I repeated, scarcely above a whisper. "Go after David." He had been my favorite uncle, but to an old New Englander law is more than love. "But first," I added, "let's take poor Saul somewhere—over to my barn."

The storm was slackening as the others started with the body, staggering beneath the load as their feet sank into the heavy mud. Fred and I went on ahead.

It was only an hour since we had been after David before, and we expected to find him still at his house; but even before we came to my barn I caught sight of him wading in the river, over toward the deep hole where, as boys, we had learned to swim. Without a word we turned our steps that way.

All unconscious of our approach, he was poking about in the water with a long, crooked branch, trying here and there, dragging his stick across the bottom. We stood still and watched as he kept up his feverish search, and all at once it came to me what he was doing. Here, I knew, was where he had sunk Saul's dead body; and now, fearful lest the flood and the blast might have disturbed it, he was poking about to make sure that his ghastly secret was safe.

I tried to sound unconcerned as I called:

"David, what are you doing?"

He turned with a start, and stood popping-eyed while his stick went swirling down the river.

"Just—just—just tryin' to see how deep 'tis," he lied falteringly.

All the cursing bravado had gone out of him.

"Well, it ain't so deep as 'twas," Fred replied.

"Come on over to my house, David, and get dry," said I.

We couldn't let him know our discovery until we had him in our reach.

Slowly he came out of the river and started with us across the field, Fred on one side of him and I on the other. The other men were nowhere in sight, but I knew where they were. As we came to my barn, I said:

"Come in here, and I'll give you some dry things."

The door was open, but the barn was dark, and he was well inside when Fred and I each took an arm and held him still. Suddenly he saw the horrible object on the floor.

"My God!" he shouted hoarsely. "Oh, my God!"

"It's Saul," I said, tightening my hold upon his arm.

"Yes, it's Saul," Fred repeated, and I could feel David stiffen. "You killed him," Fred accused suddenly. Raising his voice to almost a scream, he cried again: "You killed him, but we've got you, and, damn you, you won't get away!"

David had no power left even to try to escape. He collapsed between us and sank slowly to the floor.

An hour later, when the sheriff came for him, he was more like himself than I had seen him since he came home from his mysterious journey.

"I killed him—yes," he admitted. He was very calm. "We quarreled over money. Saul struck me—knocked me down, and I thought he was going to kick me to death. He tried to. To save myself I grabbed the carving knife. It was self-defense—my life or his."

"But then why did you run away?" asked the sheriff.

"Did you ever kill a man, sheriff?" David asked quietly. "Even in self-defense? Then you don't know the fear of your own deed. I sank Saul's body in the river—only such a flood as this would ever have washed it out—and I ran away. I tried to make you think he died naturally before I came back."

Now that his crime was discovered, he made no attempt to conceal anything, and at his trial, three months later, he told the same straightforward story. Folks were undoubtedly disposed in his favor. We had known Saul's violent temper, his ungoverned anger, and a jury of men from our own county accepted the plea of self-defense and recommended clemency. Five years in prison was his sentence.

I did not see him, for I had taken Luke to the hospital for his operation, but David wrote to me once.

"Take care of the farm for me, Mark," he wrote. "Some day I shall be out, and I shall want my own place then."

On the day when Luke was discharged as cured, walking stiffly on his restored legs, David was taken from the county jail to prison.

"I'd like to see him just once," the boy said to me, and that afternoon we journeyed out to Charlestown and requested five minutes with our uncle.

It was a shock to me as he was brought into the waiting room. His hair had just been clipped, and his beard was shaved. He hung his head and held his face averted from our gaze. It was the first time Luke had seen him in six months.

The boy rose awkwardly, and stepped close to the prisoner, with his hand outstretched.

"David—" he began.

As our uncle turned his face, I saw Luke's cheeks go white and his eyes pop nearly from his head. And then I, too, saw what the beard had concealed—a livid scar that ran the length of the man's face.

"Saul!" Luke cried. "You liar! You thief! You murderer!"

THE BANQUET

I GAVE a banquet to my friends to-day;

My hospitality was gladly sought.

My guests? A flock of hungry winter birds.

The food? A crust. The cost? A loving thought!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

The Chambers of Tranquillity

A MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY IN THE CHINATOWN OF SAN FRANCISCO

By Clarence A. Locan and Lemuel L. De Bra

LEE FONG KWUCK, diminutive and veteran waiter at the Hang Far Low, had cleared away the empty chop suey dishes from before the Eastern tourists who had made San Francisco's Chinatown and its bizarre sights their program for the night, had pocketed his tip—and then had bethought himself of real business again. In the rush of waiting on the tourists he had forgotten for the nonce the special party in the back room—the queer, mysterious group of old Chinese who yearly gathered to enjoy a banquet that took four days to prepare and almost a whole night to consume.

Fearful that the old men would be displeased at not receiving enough attention, Lee Fong Kwuck donned his most apologetic and propitiatory smile and glided swiftly and silently down the hall to the "special room."

Later—only about three flaps of a slipper later—a terrified Lee Fong Kwuck was clinging to the edge of the stained counter and shouting incoherent Cantonese at old Lim Ben, the proprietor. Three flaps after that, Lim Ben, despite his rheumatism, had reached the middle of Grant Avenue and was blowing blast after blast on his police whistle.

Darwood, of the Chinatown plain-clothes squad, reached the scene, pried Lim Ben away from the whistle, and, after shaking him several times, managed to get a few words of sense out of the frightened old man. Then the officer dashed into the restaurant. Up the stairs he went, three steps at a time, down the hall, into the "special room"—and out again.

A moment later he had headquarters on the phone. Lee Fong Kwuck and Lim Ben waited breathlessly.

"That you, captain? Darwood speaking. Well, there's a funny thing here at

the Hang Far Low—five Chinks in a back room sitting around a table, natural as life—and every one dead as a mackerel!"

II

DETECTIVE Barney Dodds never could fathom the doings of the Chinese, he remarked during the brief trip from the Hall of Justice to Chinatown, as he and his "side kick," Marty O'Brien, speculated on the queer tale that had just come over the wire. Doc Zeig, the autopsy surgeon—who happened to be in the hall, and so took time by the forelock and came along—added to this fund of general misinformation the positive statement that Bret Harte was right about the "heathen Chinese." He further opined that there would probably be a tong war over the reported tragedy, whatever had happened.

While the doctor was casting an expert eye over the bodies—picking up an eyelid on one and marking the coloration, testing another for rigidity, and otherwise investigating—the detectives seized on the frightened waiter and the jabbering proprietor of the restaurant.

Squadman Darwood, however, had already gleaned from them all they knew, or cared to tell—which is vastly different, but amounts to the same thing so far as any foreign devil policeman is concerned.

It seemed that the men dined but once a year at the Hang Far Low. No, it wasn't a tong. Judging by the family names that Lee Fong Kwuck had overheard mentioned at table, the old men, if they belonged to any tong, would represent several opposing factions; but the veteran waiter had never overheard much. The diners almost invariably fell silent as soon as he came within hearing distance.

Only five had come that night; but originally there had been ten. This Lee Fong

Kwuck and Lim Ben could recall easily; for, although death had apparently taken several of the original members, always ten places were set. Food and drink were served in generous portions at each of the vacant places. Lee Fong Kwuck always thought this very queer; but there was about these old men something that discouraged curiosity.

As far back as Lee Fong Kwuck and Lim Ben could remember, these old men had come each year to their banquet. Accompanied by the necessary sum of money—which, by the way, was always in gold—there would be the order to prepare the food, the choicest viands imported from China. Then, shortly after dark, the men would begin to arrive at the restaurant; shortly before dawn they would leave. Neither Lee Fong Kwuck, nor old Lim Ben, nor any one else around the Hang Far Low, knew whence they came or whither they vanished.

"Every year him come," explained Lim Ben for the tenth time. "Have fine dinner—go away. Pay much money, and eat and drink all night. Every year, not so much member—him die. To-night, only five. To-morrow—no more dinner. Lose much money!"

"Bah!" remarked Barney.

Doc Zeig, meanwhile, had finished his examination of the five bodies. Frankly, he was stumped. Pressed by the detectives, he merely shook his head and frowned. He had a reputation to maintain, and he didn't propose to take chances. There were indications of poisoning, and others that contradicted them.

When, later, the autopsy, and a careful analysis of all the food on the table, including the tea and a small jar of Chinese wine, failed to show a trace of any known poison, Doc Zeig was glad he had kept silent.

The detectives went over the ground again, but found nothing in the way of evidence. Very carefully they looked over the few Chinese who had been dining in the restaurant. Then, seeing no reason for holding them, the officers cleared them out of the place.

That's how Detective Barney Dodds happened to spy Juey Loy.

Juey Loy was the star reporter on the *Chinese Herald*, Chinatown's great newspaper. He was a graduate of the University of California, had worked on an Oak-

land daily, and knew the newspaper game from both the Chinese and the American angle.

The detectives knew Juey, liked the young man, and trusted him. They promptly haled him before Lee Fong Kwuck and old Lim Ben, and told him to follow his natural inclinations.

Juey had the advantage, of course, of having understood perfectly everything that had been said in English. Now, in rapid-fire Cantonese, he began questioning and cross-questioning the waiter and the proprietor of the restaurant. At the conclusion, he turned to the detectives, shook his head in perplexity, and remarked in his precise college English:

"I am quite sure, gentlemen, that these men have told you truthfully all that they know about this mysterious and unfortunate affair."

Baffled, and not a little disgusted, the detectives rang for the black wagon. They threw a police guard around the Hang Far Low. Lest a tong war should break out, they ordered an extra detail into Chinatown. Then, on general principles, they arrested little Lee Fong Kwuck, the waiter, and old Lim Ben, the proprietor. And the newspapers got out extras.

III

FOR about the time that it takes to make the three times three bows before one's ancestral tablets, Juey Loy stood by the curb and watched with narrowed eyes the motley throng that had gathered in front of the Hang Far Low. Then he turned down Grant Avenue and walked rapidly until he came to the stairway that led up to the home of Gar Feng, the august writer of letters.

Gar Feng was an old man, versed in the "Five Books" and the "Five Classics," and a learned Confucian scholar. He earned his rice by writing letters for his less literate countrymen. He knew everybody and everything in the Chinese quarter. He liked Juey Loy, notwithstanding the young man's adopted American ways. When he could do so without breaking a trust, he willingly gave the reporter much valuable information, besides much equally valuable advice.

Juey found Gar Feng sitting before a teakwood desk, reading a yellowed copy of the "Analects of Kung-foo-tsze," and munching at a bowl of Shensi almonds. As

Juey entered, Gar Feng arose, clasped his hands over his stomach, and bowed stiffly from the hips.

"*Hoo la mai!*" he exclaimed in guttural Cantonese. "How do you do, Juey Loy?"

Juey had formed the American habit of discarding the proprieties and getting right down to business. While he told his story, Gar Feng sat with half closed eyes, his hands again clasped over his stomach—which, as any one knows, is the seat of wisdom.

"Did you say there were five?" he inquired, when Juey had finished.

"That is correct, sir scholar."

"Recite to me their august surnames."

"The names," said Juey, reading from notes he had made, "are Leong Soo, Jai Man, Lee Woh, Kang Yuen, and Look Ying."

Gar Feng, in a sibilant whisper, repeated the names after the reporter. When he had finished, the old scholar's long eyes widened for an instant. Then, slowly, the lids drew down over the bronze pupils like shades over windows. He bowed his head.

"The Chambers of Tranquillity!" he murmured in tuneful Cantonese, as if speaking to himself. "Ah, by the nine heavens, where is justice? Where, oh, Eye of Heaven, where is justice?"

"Sir, you speak in riddles," remarked Juey Loy, politely.

Gar Feng started, as if, for the moment, he had forgotten his guest.

"But I speak," he said. "You should be thankful for the riddle." He closed his eyes again for a moment, and then looked up at the young man. "Come to me at this hour three days hence, and you shall receive the answer, Juey Loy."

"Three days! Why not to-night, sir scholar?"

"In three days," repeated Gar Feng. "Will you accept tea?"

The offer of the parting cup of tea, Juey Loy knew well, was merely a polite way of reminding him that he should be on his way. He arose, and bowed.

"I will be here, venerable Gar Feng. *Ho hang lai!*"

"Walk slowly, Juey Loy!"

Two doors below, in a darkened stairway, Juey Loy paused to consider what he had heard. His meditations brought him nowhere. He was about to light another cigarette and pass on, when he chanced to see Gar Feng. The old letter-

writer was hurrying down Grant Avenue as fast as his age would permit.

Juey Loy followed, keeping at a discreet distance behind. A few minutes later he saw Gar Feng enter a building on Stockton Street—a three-story brick structure bearing a huge perpendicular sign whose gilt and crimson ideographs proclaimed it as the home of the Benevolent Association of the Four Friends.

Wondering much, Juey Loy took up a station in a doorway across the street, and waited. The Benevolent Association of the Four Friends, he knew, was not a tong; it was an organization composed of prominent members of four friendly tongs. Its object was to look out for the welfare of the Chinese, regardless of tong affiliations. It also performed other duties, occasionally; but concerning these Juey Loy, being, after all, Chinese, knew much but said and wrote nothing.

Not long after Gar Feng had disappeared within the great doors of the brick building, two Chinese hurried out. They wore black satin blouses and felt hats. Juey Loy recognized both men at once; and to his curiosity was added something akin to alarm.

Quietly he stepped out of the doorway to follow; but there he stopped. He suddenly recalled Gar Feng's words, his promise. Gar Feng wanted him to wait three days; and Gar Feng always knew what was best.

Well, he would wait.

IV

ON the third night following, Juey Loy sat by the side of Gar Feng in the secret council chambers of the Benevolent Association of the Four Friends.

To Juey there was nothing unusual or bizarre in the surroundings. He had seen such chambers before—the softly gleaming teakwood furniture, the fantastically garbed Chinese sitting in a semicircle before a raised altar, the walls made practically soundproof with gorgeously embroidered Cantonese tapestries.

On the altar, covered with strips of white linen—white being the Chinese symbol of mourning—lay the bodies of the five old men who had passed away so mysteriously at the Hang Far Low. Following the verdict of the coroner's jury—that the men had died from natural causes brought on by their advanced age—the waiter and old

Lim Ben had been released, and the five bodies had been turned over to the Benevolent Association of the Four Friends for burial.

At the muffled sound of a gong, sibilant whispers stopped quickly, and a hush fell over the assembly. Behind the altar the curtains parted. A gowned Chinese, with the severe countenance and dignified mien of a Buddhist priest, walked slowly past the white row of the dead, to the center of the altar. Juey recognized him as Bow Tsue, the president of the association, and a man of power in Chinatown.

"Our people to-day are fortunate," began Bow Tsue, in the harsh singsong of one who recites a speech he has memorized. "They do not realize the hardships, the sufferings, the deprivations, endured by those who first came to this land of the white foreign devil. To-day there is work for all, profitable business for all, money and food for all. Every one can be as well fed as a pig at a marriage feast."

No one smiled at this remark, for that would have been very impolite indeed. All waited, respectfully silent.

"Because they were always hungry in China," Bow Tsue went on, raising his voice, "our ancestors crossed the Four Seas to this strange land, where men speak a strange language and follow after strange customs. Here they became servants of the white foreign devils. For them they tilled the fields, worked in the mines, washed soiled laundry, and did other menial tasks. The pay was very poor, the work very hard; and often, after the Festival of the Harvests, they had scarcely enough left to keep them alive during the winter until work began again with the coming of spring.

"You and I and all of us of this generation have heard these things from the lips of our august parents, and we know that they are true; but I am going to tell you to-night how certain of these old countrymen of ours, with more wisdom in their stomachs than gold in their purses, planned to cheat poverty and the terrors of a starving old age.

"There were ten of them. They met one night, after the harvests, at a restaurant, and there they ate and drank and made merry, knowing that it would be their last feast for many months. When the night had passed, and it was nearing the hour of morning rice, these ten men, over

their cups of *mui kwei lo*, agreed that so long as they had, they would share with any of their number who had not. If any one of them became ill, the others would provide medicine. Should one die, the others would share the cost of a suitable funeral, including the purchase of a coffin and its transportation across the sea to the burial ground of the deceased's parents and ancestors.

"In order that there might be funds when required, each member agreed to pay a certain sum each month he worked; and this money was given into the care of one appointed as the keeper of the fund. From this fund hungry members would be fed, sick members would be cared for, those who had ascended the dragon would be properly buried; and each year the remaining members would meet one night, to eat and drink and be of merry countenance.

"When they had agreed to all this, they placed in the center of the table a bowl of wine. Each member in turn arose and let a few drops of blood from his wrist, which fell and mingled with the wine. Then all were served; and, touching the wine to their lips, each took the oath of the crimson wine that he would never break faith with his blood brothers.

"Because they now no longer feared the approach of old age when none could work, because they were assured of a proper resting place for their bones after death, they named their organization the 'Chambers of Tranquillity.'

"Because these men were suspicious of the white foreign devils, fearing their secret fund would be stolen, and—I say it with shame—because they were also suspicious of us of the younger generation, they kept this matter as much a secret as possible. Few of us to-day knew of the society, or could name more than two or three of its members.

"Thus having prepared for death, the old men found that for many years death passed them by. Finally, when only six of the original ten remained, and no one of these was able to work, it was found that the fund they had accumulated was rapidly being exhausted. With heaven-born wisdom, they agreed to set aside the sum necessary to purchase six coffins, with other necessary charges, including shipping back to Canton. Then, when the remainder was about gone, they would hold a final banquet and eat and drink and congratulate

each other on a peaceful life, after which each would drink of the essence of dissolving death, and so pass serenely from the Chambers of Tranquillity into the courts of the dead."

Bow Tsue moved to one side of the altar, and again Juey Loy heard a muffled gong. Behind the altar the curtains parted, and four Chinese entered, bearing a coffin. Turning back the white linen covering, they gently placed one of the corpses within the casket.

"That is Jai Man," said Bow Tsue. "Born third year, Hwang Ling, second month, tenth day. May his bones grow yellow with generations of peace!"

Then the lid was closed and sealed. This casket was removed, and another brought, and again Bow Tsue spoke briefly while another of the old men was laid away in the coffin purchased with their secret fund.

When this had been done five times, and the altar cleared of its burden, Juey Loy turned to Gar Feng and started to arise; but the old letter-writer frowned and motioned for silence.

Once more a gong sounded; and at once, from somewhere in the hall behind the assembly, Juey Loy heard the soft *sliff-sliff* of slippered feet. Since it would be the height of impropriety to look around, Juey, like the others, waited.

Two Chinese, whom Juey recognized as the two he had seen leave the building shortly after Gar Feng had entered, approached the altar. Between them, each holding to one of his arms, was an old Chinese. He was neither bound nor gagged, but he seemed helpless and paralyzed with terror. The two men were obliged to lift him up to the altar. There he was turned to face the gathering.

"This," said Bow Tsue, "is Wah Sin—born second year, Hwang Ling, fourth month, seventh day. Wah Sin," he went on, without the slightest trace of emotion, "is the sixth remaining of the original ten in the Chambers of Tranquillity. He was the trusted keeper of the fund. From him I learned much of what I have told you to-night. From him, also, I heard how, overcome by greed, he renounced the solemn oath of the crimson wine, and how, that he might revel for a few years with the whole of their fund, he slew his five companions."

Juey Loy, despite his Chinese blood, started sharply. Gar Feng quickly laid a

bony hand on the young man's arm and enjoined silence.

"A letter had been written and signed by the six remaining members, explaining about the fund and its use," Bow Tsue continued. "This letter, and the remainder of the gold, Wah Sin was to bring to me on the evening of the final banquet, so that we could attend to the purchase of the coffins and their transportation back to the Middle Kingdom. Then Wah Sin was to join his companions, carrying with him the essence of dissolving death, which he had obtained from China. Of this all six were to drink, so that they would pass together into the courts of the dead."

"On that night, shortly after the hour of evening rice, Wah Sin called on Leong Soo and gave him a jar of the wine called dew of roses, and urged Leong to see that all drank and made merry without waiting for Wah Sin, who might arrive late. This they did."

"As you may know, this Chinese poison, distilled from the wings of the dragon, not only slays quickly, but, exposed to the air, it evaporates in a few minutes and leaves not a trace. That is why the foreign devil chemists did not learn that into the jar of wine he gave Leong, this man, Wah Sin, had already placed the essence of dissolving death."

There was a moment of silence; then again the gong sounded. Behind the altar the curtains parted, and the four Chinese entered.

Between them, slowly and solemnly, they bore—the sixth coffin.

V

LEE FONG KWUCK, the diminutive waiter at the Hang Far Low, cleared the empty dishes from before his distinguished patrons and refilled their bowls with the steaming Souchong.

"That was justice," admitted Juey Loy in cautious Cantonese, when the waiter had gone. "Nevertheless, I think they should have given him opium, or something."

"Haie-e!" whispered Gar Feng, widening his long eyes. "That would have been very wicked. The letter instructed us to purchase six caskets, place the six remaining members therein, and ship them back to Canton. That Wah Sin was still alive was annoying, of course; but we could not let that trifling matter interfere with our fraternal duty."

The Man Hunt

A ROMANCE OF NEW YORK AND THE CHESAPEAKE

By Hulbert Footner

Author of "Thieves' Wit," "Country Love," etc.

XVII

PEN scampered across the porch, and into the house, closing and locking the door behind her. Her whole being hung on the agonizing question, was he there? She ran back through the hall into the kitchen. In the dark depths of the house her hands served her for eyes, she knew it so well.

Her hand went unerringly to the knob of the door that gave on the cellar stairs. She ran down. At the foot of the stairs an agony of apprehension constricted her throat. She could not speak aloud.

"Don!" she gasped.

From out of the dark came the answering whisper:

"Pen!"

In the ecstasy of relief that flooded her, Pen lost her grip on reality for a moment. Her knees gave under her. She sank down in a heap on the earthen floor.

Don sought all around for her in the dark.

"Pen! Pen!" he whispered urgently.

He stumbled against her. He gathered her up and held her against him. She clung around his neck in a sort of desperation. The warmth of him, the ripple of muscle under his cotton shirt, the strong rise of his breast against hers, all seemed to pour a new life into her. He was very real!

"Oh, my darling!" she whispered. "Oh, Heavens, what a day!"

"Something has happened?" he said.

In her relief, she felt a little light-headed.

"A few things!" she giggled.

"Tell me."

"I will. Let's get out of this hole."

"Is it safe?"

"My dear! Did you think I was going to store you among the potatoes?"

"I'll carry you up."

"No, I'm all right again. I must lead you."

She pulled him after her toward the stairs. She made no allowance for his unfamiliarity with the place, and he fell over the bottom step with a clatter. Don went rigid. Pen laughed as women do in the dark.

"Clumsy!" she whispered.

In the kitchen he asked for water. She led him to the pail, and held the dipper to his lips. They both drank like hard-driven horses, and sighed with refreshment. Then she led him up the back stairs.

At the top she left him for a moment, while she blew out the lamps in the back rooms. When they got to the main upper hall, through the transom over Pendleton's door they heard a sound like a saw being drawn very slowly through rotten wood. It started Pen off again. She hastily pulled Don into her room, and, closing her door, smothered her laughter in his neck.

That set him going. They quivered and rocked with suppressed laughter. They finally sank down on a sofa, weak, but immensely refreshed. There is nothing like laughter.

"What room is this?" whispered Don.

"My room."

"Oh, Pen!" he murmured.

"Don't you like being here?"

He drew her hard against his side.

"Oh, Pen! I can't tell you how it makes me feel!"

"What more natural refuge could you have, dear?"

"But where are you going to keep me, Pen?" he asked.

"Right here."

He drew away from her.

"Oh, no, I couldn't let you!"

She became angry immediately.

"Why not? Is it because of the danger to my reputation? How perfectly silly, under the circumstances!"

"It isn't only that," he muttered sullenly. "It's the same old thing—hiding behind your skirts. I can't bear it. Why, suppose I were found here?"

All at once the two seemed completely divided.

"Oh, you make me so angry!" she said.

"Thinking about what people would say! You think more of what people say than you do of me. What have you and I got to do with what people say?"

"You're not quite fair to me, Pen," he protested.

The note of quiet stubbornness terrified her. Here was a force she could not gage.

"Oh, we must not quarrel!" she murmured, with a catch in her breath. "Oh, Don, I love you so!"

"Oh, my Pen!" he murmured, gathering her in his arms again.

There was a blessed peaceful interlude.

"Then you will stay here until we can think up something else?" she said.

His quiet stubbornness was unaltered.

"I won't promise anything. I must be free to decide."

"But, Don! After all the trouble I have had to get you here! You're in my castle, and I must know where I have you. Mustn't you let me decide for the time being?"

"That's just the rub," he said ruefully.

"You're so bossy, Pen! If you had me here right under your thumb, I wouldn't be able to call my soul my own."

Pen refused to see any humor in the situation.

"Would it matter for a little while?"

"You wouldn't want a tame man!"

The ever present fear leaped to her lips.

"You're thinking of giving yourself up!"

"No," he said soberly. "I've changed my mind about that, since I've been reading the papers. I'll stand them off until I see a chance to make a good fight."

Pen kissed him passionately.

"Ah, that's a load off my breast!" she cried. "That's what kept me awake nights!"

"But I must be allowed to play my own hand," he insisted.

"All right, stubborn! Now listen, while I tell you everything that has happened to-day."

On the sofa near the front windows, with her lips close to his ear, she told him the story of Blanche Paglar. How sweet it was to feel in the pressure of his hand on hers how his excitement and his hope grew with the tale!

He would not let himself hope too far. When she had come to the end, he said cautiously:

"Well, that's a beginning; but it's a pretty wild scheme, Pen. You mustn't bank too much on it. Suppose you're right about Riever—and it begins to look as if you were right—no jury would take the testimony of a lot of gangsters against that of the famous millionaire. All of Riever's powerful friends would rally round him. We're not out of the woods yet."

"I don't care so much about convicting Riever so long as we raise a sufficient doubt to make a jury afraid to convict you."

"But it would be a point of honor with that gang to convict me. What happened after you got home?"

She told him that part, somewhat toned down. She suppressed the fact of Riever's proposal.

"I believe Riever's falling in love with you!" Don said wisely.

Pen smiled and kissed him.

He laughed at her tale of how she had led the detectives into the woods, and left them there watching.

"But wait a minute," he said. "After a while it will begin to percolate into their thick heads that they've been sold. They'll begin to put two and two together. They'll realize that you drew them away from the house on purpose. Take it from me, we'll have a visit from them before morning. You'd better let me go while the going's good!"

Pen clung to him.

"No! No! Can't you stay with me an hour without beginning to fidget? They're going to comb the woods at dawn. Where could you go?"

"But they'll search the house first."

"No matter. I'm on my own ground here. I'm prepared for them. Wait just a minute!"

Leaving him, she unlocked the door into the back room, and disappeared for a few minutes. She returned through the other door.

"Where've you been?" he asked.

"Preparing a line of retreat," she said, smiling.

"What time is it, Pen?"

"Not midnight yet. Things have been moving fast."

"You must be worn out, dear. Lie down and sleep. I'll keep watch."

"Silly! Do you think I could sleep with you in the room?"

"Then I'll go in the next room."

"No! What's an hour or two's sleep? Come and sit down again."

On the sofa near the window she leaned back against him, her head on his shoulder. He sank his cheek in her hair.

"Pen, it's just a week to-day since we met. Isn't that strange?"

"What's time got to do with it? I knew the very first moment."

"I, too."

"Story-teller! The first look you gave me was not that kind at all."

"Well, it happened so soon afterward that it doesn't count."

"I wonder how it is to a man," she murmured dreamily. "With me—well, it was like hating you, you upset me so."

"You made me a little sore, too. You were so bossy!"

"You always say that!"

He chuckled in his throat.

"Dearest, I have a confession to make to you," she whispered. "Do you know, when I first read that story in the newspapers, I was glad!"

"Glad?"

"Yes. Of course I knew that it wasn't true; and I knew that I shouldn't lose you."

"Pen! You wouldn't have lost me anyway. I was thinking about it when you came down to the tent, splashing through the water. I wasn't going."

"Oh, Don, how sweet that is to my ears! Sometimes I have felt that circumstances forced me on you."

"Nothing in it! You had already got your hooks into me."

"What an expression!"

"You made truth and goodness seem so charming!"

"I, good? If you knew!"

"I do know. I know exactly what I mean. There's so much disgusting hypocrisy in the world that a fellow gets to think that the bad people are the only honest ones. You taught me better."

Pen turned and clung to him. A tear or two rolled down her cheeks.

"Oh, my dear! It isn't true; but it comforts me so!"

Enfolded in happiness and delicious peace, they became sleepy in spite of themselves. Notwithstanding his sleepy protests, she drew herself away from him.

"Stretch out," she whispered. "I will sit on the stool beside you, where I can look at you. I do so love to look at you!"

"Pen! You sleep—I'll keep watch!"

But he sank lower and lower, and soon he was gone. Pen, sitting beside him, could gaze her fill.

The moonlight was coming in at the front windows now. The direct rays did not fall on him, but there was light enough for her to see. All relaxed and helpless, he seemed to belong to her more completely than he ever did awake—and stubborn. She could scarcely bear to look at him.

In the end she slept, too, with her cheek on his breast.

She was awakened, she knew not how long afterward, by a noise. Even in the instant of waking she recognized the sound. It was the stealthy creak of the tin roof outside her window.

At the touch of her hand on his cheek Don awoke all of a sudden. He slipped noiselessly to the floor. They crept to the middle of the room.

"There's a man on the porch roof," she breathed, with her lips at his ear.

"Did he look in?"

"I don't think so. He couldn't have seen you through the screen."

"If he tries to come in—"

"Slip through the door behind you."

Don made to creep away from her. She laid a hand on his arm.

"Wait!"

There was no further sound from the man outside.

"He's not coming in," Pen whispered. "He's out there to cut off your escape."

A tremendous *rat-tat-tat* resounded through the empty halls.

"Oh, I shouldn't have slept!" murmured Don.

"It's all right," whispered Pen. "I intended you should stay here."

"I feel trapped within walls!"

"You are safest here."

The knocking was imperiously repeated. Outside Pen's door they heard her father's agitated voice.

"Pen, are you there?"

"Yes, dad," she said coolly.

"Stay where you are, my dear. I'll go down."

For the third time that night the worthy little man pattered downstairs in his bare feet. Pen opened her door an inch. She heard her father's prudent inquiry through the closed door.

"Open the door!" replied a gruff voice outside.

Pendleton remonstrated, and the voice—Delehanty's—was brutally raised.

"Open the door, or I'll smash it in!"

She heard the key squeak in the lock. Pendleton's remonstrances were drowned in the sounds made by the entrance of a number of men. Pendleton's voice was raised in agonized tones.

"We're going to search the house," Delehanty announced.

Pen sensed that her little father was trying to bar them out by main strength. Signing to Don to remain where he was, she hastened to the head of the stairs. She called down:

"Let them in, father! We have nothing to hide."

Returning to her room, she locked the door. Her father came upstairs, accompanied by a pair of shod feet. His voice at Pen's door was utterly bewildered.

"They insist on searching the house—searching the house! At this hour!"

"Well, that's all right," said Pen.

"They say if you'll stay quietly in your room they'll leave that until last. There's a man out here on guard. * Better dress, dear."

"I shall be all right," said Pen.

She turned quickly and kissed Don with a smile on her lips. Her eyes shone with the light of battle. He looked a good deal more dubious.

"Is your way of retreat still open?" he whispered.

She nodded.

"Well, then—"

"Wait till they come upstairs."

She listened with her ear at the crack of the door. Vague sounds arose from below. She was tormented by her inability to hear exactly. Finally she motioned to Don to stand back, out of any possible range of vision. Then, opening the door, she put her head around it.

Instantly a flash light was thrown on her, and a voice said:

"You can't come out, miss!"

"I don't want to come out," said Pen coolly. "I want to hear what's going on in my house."

Her ear, practiced in that house, could follow their movements very well. They were in the cellar. They took no precautions for silence. They came stamping up the cellar stairs, and were to be heard in the kitchen and the outer kitchen. They spread through the main rooms of the house. Pen smiled to herself, hearing them move heavy objects of furniture, looking for hiding places in the walls. Finally they started up the main stairway, but were diverted into the rear extension. Doors were opened and shut, furniture pulled about.

As they started to move back toward the front, Pen closed her door.

"They're coming!" she breathed in Don's ear. "Now's the time!"

She took him to the door leading to the rear room.

"Lock this door behind you, and put the key in your pocket." She pointed to an open window in the corner of the room, facing the rear. "There's your way out. The ironing board is on the floor under the window. Stretch it across catcornered to the sash of the bathroom window. I pulled down the top sash ready for you. As you go, turn and close this window behind you. When you get into the bathroom, pull the board after you. Don't touch that window. It squeaks. Wait in the bathroom with the door open. If you hear anybody coming that way, slip down the back stairs and into the cellar. While you're in the bathroom, watch this window. When they're through with this room, I'll raise the window and leave it up. That's your signal to come back."

There was a peremptory knock on the door of Pen's room. The lovers pressed hands and parted. Slipping through the door, Don closed it noiselessly and turned the key.

"What is it?" Pen asked.

"Open the door, please!" the voice of Delehanty brusquely replied.

Pen wanted all the time she could gain.

"Is my father there?" she asked, as if in doubt.

"Yes, my dear," said Pendleton quaveringly. "Please open!"

"One moment!"

She turned down the covers of her bed, and rumbled them. Her ears were strained

for sounds from the back, but she heard nothing. So much the better!

"You've had plenty of time to dress!" said Delehanty harshly.

She opened the door. There was a small crowd in the hall. One man carried a brilliant acetylene lantern, which filled the place with a strong white light and threw grotesque shadows upward. Some of the detectives were tall, some were short; all of them had their hats on. It was like a caricature in violent chiaroscuro.

As for Pendleton Broome, he had his trousers pulled over his nightshirt, and his bare feet looked piteous. A picture of ineffectiveness, he was still carrying a lighted candle in all that glare.

Without so much as "by your leave," Delehanty strode into the room, with three of his men at his heels. The chief was chewing an extinct cigar, which smelled vilely.

Pen choked with rage. She bit her lips to keep back an outburst. Her father went to her, and squeezed her hand imploringly.

The three men spread around the room like well trained dogs. One could imagine them sniffing. They were armed with electric torches, with which to illumine dark corners. Delehanty went direct to the door into the rear room, and rattled it.

"What's behind here?" he demanded.

"Another bedroom," said Pen. "The guest room."

"Guest room?" sneered Delehanty. "Where's the key?"

"The door has been locked for many years. I couldn't tell you."

"Well, why is the door from that room into the hall locked?"

"Because I keep certain things of value in there. I don't want the servants to be going in."

Pen's father must have wondered at this answer; but perhaps he was too much confused to take in what she was saying. At any rate, he kept quiet.

"That key's lost, too, I suppose," sneered Delehanty.

"No," said Pen calmly. "It's among the other keys on the rack in my sewing room. My father will get it for you."

Pendleton trotted obediently away with his candle.

When he came back with the key, Delehanty's sleuths had completed their search of Pen's room. The whole party passed around through the hall to the door of the

guest room. The men showed excitement. They thought they had their man.

Delehanty flung the door open and stepped back. He ordered his men to cast the light of their electric torches inside. This was to draw the fire of the supposed occupant. Pen's lip curled. Finally the men ventured across the threshold.

The acetylene lantern filled the great bare chamber with light. It was meagerly furnished—a gigantic bedroom set of the carved walnut period, a bed with an old-fashioned mosquito bar, an air-tight stove, a humble little rocking-chair. The great expanse of white wall was guiltless of paper or tint, and showed long, fine cracks running in every direction, like the map of a complicated river system. The floor was covered with matting.

Delehanty sniffed.

"The air is fresh. There's been a window open in here!"

Pen's heart contracted.

"The room is aired every day," she said quickly.

Delehanty went to the window in the corner. The two windows at the side of the room were shuttered on the outside. He cast his light along the sill.

"There's no dust here, I notice," he said accusingly.

"There's no dust anywhere in my house," replied Pen.

Delehanty ordered the window opened. The acetylene light was held outside. This was the crucial moment. Pen held her breath.

"What is there?" asked Delehanty.

"Eighteen or twenty feet drop, sir."

"Any gutter pipe or lightning rod?"

"No, sir."

"Close the window."

Pen breathed again.

The bare room offered but few places of concealment—under the bed, within the washstand, a shallow clothes closet in the wall. They even looked in the bureau drawers. Finally Delehanty, with a grunt, moved toward the door. Pen's heart swelled big with triumph. She glanced at Delehanty's cigar.

"Would you mind leaving the window open?" she said cuttingly.

At a nod from the chief, one of the men flung up the sash. Pen felt a little quiver of inward laughter. There was something humorous in making the enemy transmit one's signals.

All left the room, and Pen locked the door. She handed the key to her father.

"Please put it where you got it," she said.

Delehanty fixed her with an irascible, suspicious eye.

"You come along with us the rest of the way, miss. I want no trickery!"

Pen shrugged.

The search went on, that queer crew straggling through the rooms, accompanied by their grotesque upflung shadows. They went through Pen's sewing room and into Pendleton's bedroom. From thence they passed into the extraordinary room behind, where he kept all his "collections." He never threw anything away. Everything under the sun was to be found there. All around the walls were rickety, homemade tables heaped with his impedimenta.

All this occupied the searchers quite a while. They threw his stuff about, regardless of his protests.

Finally there was the third story, which Pen had long ago given up to dust and spiders, and, last of all, the "cupalaw," into which Keesing, to Pen's amusement, ascended with drawn revolver.

In the end Delehanty stamped downstairs in a villainous temper, his soft-footed sleuths at his heels.

At the front door Pendleton attempted to recover his dignity.

"Now I trust you'll favor me with some explanation," he began.

"Ah! Ask your daughter for the explanation!" snarled the detective. "Take my advice, and keep her home nights!"

They all went. Pendleton turned to Pen, aghast.

"What did he mean by that?"

But Pen's heart was dancing. An irresponsible gale of laughter caught her up. She had an irresistible impulse to see her father's bare feet twinkle. She caught his wrists—he still had the candle—and attempted to whirl him around.

"Oh, joy! Oh, joy! Oh, joy!" she cried. "They're gone!"

"Pen! Have you gone crazy?" her father protested.

"Yes—it's the heat!"

"Be quiet! What did the man mean?"

"How do I know? A man will say anything when he's sore. Come on back to bed!"

She pulled him wildly to the foot of the stairs, Pendleton leaning back, and his bare

feet slapping the floor absurdly. Pen laughed so much that she had to sit on the bottom step to recover.

"Your levity is very ill-timed!" he said severely.

That only made her laugh the more.

"Come on! Come on!" she said, dragging him upstairs.

At the door of his room she kissed him and gave him a push inside. She flew across to her own room and let herself in.

"Don! Don!" she just breathed, holding out her hands.

There was no answer.

She flew to the door between the two rooms. It yielded to her hand. The key was in it; so he had come back. The window in the corner was still open.

It was very dark in the back room. She felt all around for him, softly whispering his name. Her breast contracted with apprehension. She ran back into the front room, to make a light.

As soon as the candle flame grew up, she saw a piece of paper pinned to the wooden mantel. It looked like the fly leaf torn out of a book. There was a pencil scrawl upon it:

DEAREST:

Writing in the dark. That was too near a thing. Can't let you take such risks. I'm off on my own. Don't worry. Love.

D.

XVIII

PEN lay on her bed, wide-eyed and dry-eyed, until near dawn. Her misery was not lessened by the fact that a good part of it was anger at having her will balked. She accused Don by turn of callousness, of ingratitude, of folly; she tried to tell herself that he was not worth saving, but without abating any of her torments of anxiety as to his fate.

Indeed, it was worse than anxiety. She had a horrible, dull certainty that he would be taken as soon as it became light. Like a willful child intent only upon having his own way, he had run blindly out into their trap!

After the briefest period of unconsciousness she was awakened by a stir outside the house. Looking out of the window, she saw that the sun was just up, and the great square shadow of the house reached almost to the edge of the bank. Nevertheless, early as it was, the house grounds were full of people, and more were arriving through the gates. These were Absalom Islanders,

fisher folk, and men from the farms in earth-colored garments. Under the bank she could hear the *put-put* of arriving motor boats.

Among the people the gross figure of Delehanty was conspicuous, moving about, picking out men here and there. Well, if he was still looking for men, Don was not yet caught; but Pen's heart sickened at the sight.

It was clear enough what was happening. During the last few days popular interest in the chase had fallen off, but the news of the discovery of the canoe had revived it. The blood lust was aroused again.

When she got down to the kitchen, Pen learned from the excited negroes that Riever had increased the reward to ten thousand dollars. That was what had brought the crowd!

Like a woman who had died, and whose body was condemned to drag on, Pen started things going in the kitchen and set the table for breakfast. When her father came into the dining room, even he, who noticed so little, was struck by the contrast of her present look with that of the laughing manad who had thrust him into his room the night before.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

Pen shrugged. She had to make some excuse.

"Last night was too much for me," she muttered.

"I thought so," he said severely. "I told you you were acting wildly. Riever had nothing to do with that affair," he added irrelevantly.

"What difference does it make?"

Pendleton had already been out of doors, and he could talk about nothing but the latest developments of the case. In his new interest, his resentment against Delehanty had cooled.

Pen could not gather from his talk what they were saying about her. No doubt they spared his feelings—or perhaps they mocked him without his being aware of it. With the blindness that was characteristic of him, he had not yet connected the discovery of the canoe with his daughter.

"How strange that Counsell should have come back here after having paddled away!" he said. "And yet, how natural! It was the last thing any one would suppose that he would do."

Pen let him run on, only half attending. Worse was in store for her.

"Of course Riever has been entirely discreet in making his new announcement. He had it written out and sent it over to the island last night, to be posted up outside the store. 'Ten thousand dollars for the apprehension of Donald Counsell,' his offer read; but of course it means dead or alive. Many of the men are armed."

Pen thought she had experienced the extremity of torment; but it came now. She half rose from her chair, with a face of horror, and dropped back again.

"But this is murder!" she gasped.

"Eh?" said little Pendleton, blinking.

"Cold-blooded murder! Cynical murder! To set an armed mob after a defenseless man, with the promise of reward!"

"But he's desperate. If he's cornered, he'll fight."

"He is unarmed!" said Pen.

Her father's jaw dropped.

"How do you know?"

She saw that she had betrayed herself, but she was beyond caring. Pushing her chair back, she went to the mantel, rested her arms upon it, and dropped her head on them.

"Oh, God! What sort of a world is it where such things are possible?" she cried.

"Pen, what am I to think from this?" he stammered, aghast.

She could not be still in her agony. She paced up and down, stretching up her arms as if to ease her breast; but ease was not to be had.

"Whatever you like!" she said.

"You have been seeing him? You know where he is?"

"I don't know now."

"My God!"

Pen hurried from the room, leaving her father in a state of collapse.

She went about her daily tasks like a piece of mechanism. She had to keep in some sort of motion. She experienced strange lapses; discovered herself offering whole corn in her hand to the newly hatched chicks; came to find herself in places without any notion of what she had come for. Her father kept out of her way.

It took a long time to organize the searchers. Delehanty was not taking any chance of failure. He was in no particular hurry, for he had already sent a large party by boat to the head of the creek, to cut off any escape up the Neck.

Finally, about ten o'clock, the rest were ready. They set off in three parties, the

first making its way along the river shore, to comb the woods on the Absalom's Island side; the second setting off toward the lighthouse, to surround the pond in the woods; the third and largest party heading straight back by the Neck road. Their instructions were to deploy along the edge of the woods, and wait until they got in touch with the parties on either flank. Two lads with motor cycles were delegated to act as messengers between Delehanty and the searchers.

When they had gone, an ominous Sabbath quiet descended on Broome's Point, which was harder to bear than the confusion. Delehanty went off to the cottage. There was no one to be seen but a few of the yellow-faced squatters' women from up the Neck, who peered from under their sun-bonnets with shy, half human eyes, and a group of old men standing by the porch zestfully discussing bygone murders.

Later, Pen came upon her father in the back kitchen, or dairy, evidently seeking to waylay her. He seemed not greatly affected by the scene in the dining room, only for a hangdog air and a difficulty in meeting her glance. As a matter of fact, Pen's tragic eyes intimidated him. For himself, he had been absorbed in trifles for so long that he could not feel anything very deeply.

"I suppose you've forgotten that we were to lunch on the yacht to-day," he said.

Pen stared at him in silence. *Still* he had not understood!

"I suppose you don't want to go," he added.

"No," said Pen.

"What will Mr. Riever think?" he said plaintively.

"I don't care."

The gathering storm on her brows warned him not to go any further; but he still hung around like a child.

"Why don't you go?" Pen suggested, to get rid of him.

He brightened.

"Well, I wasn't sure if it was proper—"

"Oh, go ahead! Tell him I'm sick. Tell him anything you like."

"Well, I will, if you think it's all right. I want to talk business with him, anyway."

He donned the old frock coat and the comical flat straw hat, and set off as blithely as a child with a penny in its hand. Pen's glance after him was bitter. Nevertheless, she was thankful to be rid of him.

There came a time when Pen could no longer keep up even the pretense of doing her chores. Always, with her mind's eye, she was following the searchers. They had come to the edge of the woods. They were spreading out. They were waiting until the parties on either side came up. Now they had climbed the fence and were advancing slowly, with their guns held ready—ignorant, passionate men with their guns cocked!

She went to her room, and paced up and down, with her clenched hands pressed to her breast. She could not stay there, either. She came down on the porch, where she could hear better, and paced endlessly up and down, careless who might be a witness of her agitation. All her faculties were concentrated on hearing. She was listening for shots.

Time passed, and there was no news. She sent Ellick, the more intelligent of Aunt Maria's sons, down to the beach, to pick up what he could. One or two negroes had come over in the boats. This was regarded as a white man's business, and they were not allowed to take part in it.

Nothing transpired until mid afternoon, when Ellick came back to say that the motor cycle boys had brought in Counsell's camping outfit, which had been found in the woods. Of the fugitive himself there was no word.

A wild hope arose in Pen's breast. Suppose, after all, he had succeeded in getting away up the Neck before the line was drawn across it!

Her hope soon died, however. What good if he had escaped for the moment? There was but the one road, eighty miles long, by which he could reach cities and crowds and safety; and by this time everybody along that road was on the *qui vive* to catch him, their mouths watering at the ten-thousand-dollar reward. What chance had he of succor? Where could he get food, or, on that sandy peninsula, water?

She tormented her brain with futile calculations. Could he or could he not have made it?

Delehanty had dispatched the party up the creek immediately after searching the house. Pen had heard the boats set off. By that time Don had had half an hour's start. A man walks perhaps four miles an hour, the boats would average seven. It was four miles to the head of the creek, and only a step from the landing to the

Neck road. Still, Don ought to have got there first. But he might have turned aside to get something from his hidden store in the woods! Pen's brain whirled dizzily.

At other times she pictured him crouching, white-faced, in the bush, listening to the slow, relentless approach of the searchers, and knowing that the other side was watched, too. Then the dash for freedom, the shots—

That picture came back again and again. She could not shut it out. How gladly she would have heard the news that he had been brought in—unhurt!

At five o'clock she beheld her father turning in at the gate, accompanied by Riever. At sight of the latter Pen saw red. The hideous little creature, lunching on his fine yacht while his dollars sent men into the woods to murder! And now to come strutting ashore for an afternoon stroll, with his expensive cigar cocked between his lips!

How dared he present himself to Pen? Her impulse was to project herself down off the porch and tell him; but a last strand of prudence held. She went to her room, instead.

There she struggled with her feelings. Five o'clock! Faint though it might be, there was a real chance that Don had escaped. She must go on fighting for him, therefore; and in order to fight for him effectively she must maintain some sort of relations with his loathsome enemy.

There was a knock on her door, and her father said timidly:

"Mr. Riever is downstairs, my dear."

"Very well," Pen answered composedly. "I'll be down directly."

Pendleton was delighted.

"Thank you, daughter," he purred.

This induced a fresh access of anger in Pen. He had nothing to thank her for!

Pendleton pattered happily downstairs. Pen washed and dressed, never ceasing to admonish herself, and in the end achieved a fair measure of self-command, though her nerves were in bad shape.

Riever was waiting with a certain air of bravado. Only an involuntary roll to his eyes betrayed the dark passions that ate him. She greeted him calmly. He looked secretly relieved.

"I scarcely expected to see you," he said smoothly. "I just came to inquire how you were."

"I'm all right," said Pen.

"And to express my indignation at what happened last night. Delehantry certainly goes beyond all bounds! When I get back to New York, I shall talk to the commissioner about it."

"Oh, the man must do his work," said Pen. "Surely he doesn't expect me to be taken in by this palaver!" she thought.

"He's supposed to exercise some discretion. You're really all right again?"

"Quite all right."

"I'm so glad!"

It came to her that he didn't expect her to be taken in. He was satisfied if she would only appear to be taken in. For different reasons, he was just as anxious to maintain relations as she was. He just wanted everything unpleasant covered up. That was the spoiled child of it.

"I believe he'd actually marry me without inquiring into my feelings," thought Pen.

Well, it made it easier for her.

Pendleton made some transparent excuse to leave the room. Riever's shifty eyes gave a roll of terror, thinking that perhaps Pen might now insist on dragging the truth into the light.

"I'm surprised to see you on foot this afternoon," was all that Pen said, however.

His face turned smug again.

"I like walking," he said. "It's my ridiculous people that insist on having me carried every step."

"Do you walk much in New York?" asked Pen.

He was flattered by her interest.

"Yes, a great deal," he said.

"But I forget—you don't live in the city, do you?"

"Sometimes."

"Have you a home there, too?"

"Well, not exactly a home, but a very pleasant little place."

"Ah, an apartment!"

"No, I detest apartments. You always feel as if the hall servants were spying on your comings and goings."

"You stay at your club, then?"

"No—clubs are all very well in their way, but I'm not a clubby person. I like to spread about among my own things. In a club, too, the servants are always under your feet. In New York I like to get away from servants altogether. I'm not so dependent on them as you seem to think."

Pen's heart began to beat a little thickly. Apparently they were back just where

they had been before the violent scene of the previous night.

"And have you such a place of your own?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"Do tell me about it!"

"It's a quaint little house in an unfashionable neighborhood. It stands in the name of my valet. The beauty of it is that none of my neighbors know me, and I can go and come as I please. It's a *petit maison* in the French style—a little *entresol* below, overhead three tall windows lighting the *salon*, then a receding attic, and that's all. I don't suppose there's another house like it in town."

"And the inside?" said Pen.

"A *salle à manger* on the ground floor, looking out on a little formal garden at the back. On the main floor, the *salon* in front and a bedroom in the rear. In the attic, servants' rooms. Just a little house for one—or two," he added, with a sidelong glance.

"How interesting!" said Pen. "I'd like to see it."

"I hope you will some day."

"In what part of the town is it?" asked Pen casually.

"On Thirty-Ninth Street, east of Lexington Avenue."

Pen lowered her eyes, to hide the glint of satisfaction in them.

"This will help Blanche," she thought.

"I'll write it to-night."

Presently he rose to go.

"Tell me you will," he said.

"Will what?" murmured Pen.

"Come to see my little house some day."

"Nothing is impossible," said Pen, turning away her head.

If he chose to read coquetry in the action, that was his lookout. He held her hand for a long moment, Pen steeling herself not to shudder; then he left the room.

Pen began to laugh, but there was no sound of mirth in it. She began to laugh, and she could not stop. The tears ran down her face, and her whole body was shaken with tearing sobs. She ran to her room. She was horribly unstrung. It was long before she could get hold of herself again.

This temporary collapse, however, eased the strain on her nerves. She came downstairs, and was able to resume her usual round of tasks. Time was passing, and still no bad news had been received. Gradually hope grew stronger.

Finally word was brought down the road that the search party had joined forces with the line of guards drawn across the Neck, and Don Counsell had not been taken. Pen was able to face the night unafraid.

She presently learned that Delehanty had formed his men into several camps for the night. The automobile was kept busy running up the road with supplies for them. At the same time he was preparing to have the road well patrolled along its whole course through the woods. After dark a fugitive could not travel any distance except by the road.

The night came on muggy and still, and Pen was attacked by a fresh anxiety; for clouds of mosquitoes arose. She pictured Don fainting with hunger and thirst, unable even to make a smudge, for fear of betraying himself, and vainly attempting to protect himself from the insects.

She had a wild hope that he might be driven back to her. When the house had been searched, they had found the open cellar door; and in the morning Delehanty had sent a man to shut the doors and screw them down. Before she went to bed, Pen took lantern and screwdriver, and, satisfying herself that she was not watched at the moment, knelt behind the bushes and opened the doors. She also left a way open for Don to return to her room by the route that he knew of.

She went to bed praying that she might awaken to find him kneeling on the floor beside her. She did sleep for awhile, for nature must have its due; but when she awoke, she was still alone.

When she came downstairs in the morning, she heard a new sound that froze her soul—the deep bay of hounds. Theodo' came into the kitchen, his eyes rolling wildly in an ashy face, to say that a couple of "man huntin' dawgs" had been brought over from the Eastern Shore to be put on Counsell's tracks.

These half mythical creatures filled the negro with an extremity of terror. Nothing would tempt him out of doors again. Meanwhile Pen's collie, Doug, locked up in the barn, hearing these trespassers on his preserve, and being unable to get at them, went frantic with rage.

The bloodhounds were taken to the spot in the woods where Don's cache had been discovered, and were given the scent from Don's clothes. They picked up his tracks without difficulty, and came back over the

fields, giving tongue, straight to the cellar door. Finding it unlocked again, Delehanty searched the house once more.

The dogs were led around the house. Pen, observing from within, saw that they picked up the trail again outside the kitchen window. So Don had gone out that way! However, they were soon confused amid the maze of tracks that had tramped over the house grounds in every direction. Again and again their guardians led them over the ground, but with no better success.

Meanwhile, Delehanty having made a new disposition of his forces, the search in the woods was resumed. He now had more men at his disposal, and a second line of guards was drawn across the Neck, higher up. Additional detectives arrived from New York and Baltimore, and these were dispatched by horse and motor to search every cabin within miles. At the same time motor boats were patrolling all the adjacent shores, so that if the fugitive was forced out on the beach at any point he would instantly be sighted.

Notwithstanding these measures, the second day passed like the first, with neither sight nor sound of the fugitive. It was believed that he was still in the neighborhood, because the bloodhounds, though they were led far and wide through the woods and up the road, had discovered no tracks leading away from Broome's Point.

XIX

WHEN the morning of the third day broke, Pen had reached the point of desperation again. She had not closed her eyes for a moment during the night. She was now convinced that Don was lying exhausted and starving in some hidden spot in the woods—probably no longer able even to give himself up. For she was sure he would not willingly perish without a fight to clear his name.

When she first came out of the house, the sight of a pair of buzzards circling high against the blue turned her faint and sick. To spend another day of inaction was unthinkable. Madness lay that way. There was no longer any question of helping him to escape. If he was anywhere near, he must be found, whatever might come of it.

In her extremity Pen went to Delehanty at the cottage to tell him she was going to take part in the search.

The detective was considerably taken

aback. He pushed out his lower lip and glowered at Pen.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"I want him found."

"It isn't so long ago since you wanted to lose him!"

Pen shrugged.

"Have you any fresh information?" he demanded.

"No, but I know these woods."

"We all know them now," said Delehanty dryly. He considered for a moment. "Come back in half an hour, and I'll talk to you," he said brusquely.

Pen supposed that he wanted to consult with Riever. She was in no humor to wait.

"You forget that I don't have to have your permission to search my own place," she said. "I offer to work with you. If you don't want me to, I'll go ahead alone."

She turned to leave.

"Hold on a minute!" said the detective.

"Satisfy me that you're on the square with me, and I'll work with you fast enough."

Pen was able to tell him the truth, without telling him the whole truth.

"It's very simple," she said. "I don't want him to starve on the place—that's all."

"H-m! You've lost touch with him, eh?" said Delehanty.

Pen was silent. It was of little moment to her what they *thought*, so long as they didn't *know* anything.

"What's your plan?" asked Delehanty.

"For one thing," said Pen, "the fields have never been searched. I see you send your men up the road every morning. There are hollows in the fields where a man could lie concealed. Some of the fields are growing up with young pine that would afford cover."

Delehanty looked at her with unwilling respect.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"If he's in the woods, when he hears the searchers approach, how easy it would be to climb a tree until they had passed!"

"Are you going to search every tree in the woods?" he asked sarcastically.

"No," said Pen.

"Will you take a couple of my men along with you?"

"No."

Delehanty scowled darkly.

"I shall call him as I go," said Pen.

"If he saw or heard others with me, he wouldn't be so likely to answer."

"Suppose you find him and he refuses to give himself up?"

"After three days without food he'd hardly be in a position to resist."

"Would you undertake to bring him in, then?"

"You can lend me a revolver, if you wish. I have none."

"Not on your life!" sneered Delehanty.

Pen shrugged. She had only mentioned the revolver as a bit of stage business.

"Go and find him, if you want to," said Delehanty; "but excuse me from taking any chances of having my gun slipped to him!"

Pen went back to the house and made up a packet of sandwiches. As she was setting out the second time, she ran into Riever coming in by the drive. He had evidently been with Delehanty. Under his forced air of politeness an extraordinary conflict of feelings was suggested—hope, distrust, and a gnawing curiosity. He would not speak of what was in his mind, of course.

"Where are you setting out for so busily, may I ask?" he inquired, with a false air of blitheness.

Pen was blunt enough.

"I believe this man is starving somewhere on the place, and I'm going to find him if I can."

Riever put on a look of gladness and delight. The guiding rule of his kind is that by assuming a thing to be so you make it so. He therefore assumed that Pen had come over to his side, that the millions had won out, that he and she were now one in sympathy. It need hardly be mentioned, however, that his eye still rolled with a hideous doubt.

"Oh, that's fine of you!" he said. "But it's dangerous!"

"He wouldn't hurt me," said Pen.

Riever ground his teeth secretly.

"How can you be sure?" he inquired, with a great air of solicitude.

"Because I helped him in the beginning. I fed him."

"But you've thought better of it now?" murmured Riever.

"I'm going to find him if I can."

"I believe you're out after the reward I offered!" Riever said, with a ghastly sort of facetiousness.

Pen caught at the suggestion. If she were obliged to bring Don in, the money might make all the difference to them.

"Well, why not?" she said. "I could use the money as well as anybody."

There was a quality of eagerness in her voice that could hardly have been feigned. For the moment it lulled his doubts. "There's nobody I'd rather pay it to," he said, grinning.

"You mean that?" asked Pen. "If I give him up to you, will you pay me the reward?"

"If you give him up to me, I'll double it!" he said meaningly.

"All right!" said Pen. "If I'm successful to-day, I'll hold you to that." She made to walk on.

Riever's face was full of triumph, but there was still a fear, too—another sort of fear.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Suppose you can't handle him?"

"I have no fear of that," replied Pen.

He slipped his hand into his side pocket.

"Here," he said. "Take this." He produced an automatic pistol. "Do you know how to use it?"

She shook her head. He explained the mechanism.

"Thanks," she said, putting it inside her dress, and walked on.

He strutted after her as far as the gates, and stood there watching her. She turned into the path behind the cottage, and followed it into the woods. Her idea in making the little temple her starting point was that Don, in need of succor, might haunt the paths they had followed together.

The sun was looking straight into the little glade through the side that opened above the pond, filling the place with a rich yellow light. Between the shadows of the pillars a broad beam lay athwart the inscription of the gravestone, picking out the curly flourishes of the letters that had been cut with such loving care.

Pen had become indifferent to her shadowy brother who lay under the stone. She had not remembered him for many days. Her thoughts were filled by a man of flesh and blood.

"Don! Don!" she spoke softly, not expecting any answer there, and not getting any.

She let herself down the bank to the spring around at the left, which welled between the roots of a superb white oak that the ax had spared—for a tree which guards a spring is sacred even to a timber scout. Pen had hopes of the spring, because it was

one of the only two places that Don knew of where fresh water was to be obtained. She searched carefully about it, but was not rewarded by finding any tracks. She made a wider circuit around the spot, but could not see that the underbrush had been disturbed.

She forced her way slowly through the tangle of thorny creepers and thickly springing sassafras around the pond to the old wood road. It curved away secretly into the gloom—old, undisturbed, overgrown. Nature had painted in this ancient blemish. Years ago the bed of the road had been packed so hard that even yet nothing would take root there, except a mossy growth like fur underfoot; but at either side bushes had taken advantage of the free light to spring up thickly. Now for the most part they met overhead, though there were places where the sun splashed through.

Pen walked slowly, pausing often to softly call Don's name. Nothing answered her but bird sounds and the soft chattering of leaves in the high sunlight. No breath stirred down below. She made wide detours through secondary roads—mere cuts through the woods that only a practiced eye could follow now.

It was noon when she came out at the edge of the fields. She sat down under the fence to rest, and, from a sense of duty, to eat something. Afterward she struck clear across the rough, neglected land to the woods on the other side, then back again, shaping a course that took her through every hollow.

Her experience with sheep had taught her the exact lay of the peninsula—how each depression gradually deepened into a gully, running off to some branch on one side or the other; but nowhere did she find what she was looking for.

She spent several hours searching the banks of the little stream that meandered through the woods to the east of the fields. That was where she had sent him to make his camp that night. She found the site of a camp, but no evidences that he had revisited it. There were plenty of tracks in the mud of the stream, for the searchers had passed and repassed this way; but no voice answered her soft calls.

Finally she struck across the corner of the farthest field, making for the path that went down through the woods to the arm of Back Creek—the path they had followed

on another night, a night of happiness. She thought of the old skiff drawn up at the top of the bank. She had a wild hope that he might have launched it and succeeded in making his way down the arm, and across the main creek, to the mainland. True, the skiff was leaky and rotten, but a desperate man might make it serve for a short voyage. She ran the last part of the way.

The skiff was there, just as before! She dropped down upon it, weary of body and despairing of heart, and burst into tears.

"Don! Don! Don!" she called for the last time.

A green heron mocked her with its discordant croak.

The sun was low, and there could be no further searching that day. Pen made her heavy way back through the woods and across the wide field.

As she walked, a merciful apathy descended on her. She could suffer no more. Imaginary pictures of Don starving in the woods no longer rose before her mind's eye. She was conscious only of a ghastly vacuum inside her. Within it a little thought stirred like a snake:

"This can't go on! If I don't hear in two or three days more—"

She never completed the thought, but her soul was aware of her intention.

As she was letting down the bars that admitted her to the road, a squad of men straggled by—searchers, homeward bound. Pen hung back to let them pass. The business was in the nature of a lark to them. It relieved them for the time being from the tedium of their usual lives. They were talking loud, laughing, jostling one another in the road. They stared at Pen as unabashed as animals, and Pen busied herself with the bars.

Nevertheless, she was aware that one of them did not stare at her. She looked at him, and was struck, first, by his curiously self-conscious air. She looked afresh. She rubbed her eyes, so to speak, and her heart stood still.

It was Don!

True, his chin was covered with four days' growth of reddish stubble, his bare head was tousled and unbrushed, and he walked with exactly the same shambling slouch as the others; but it was Don! He had passed her, but the line of his cheek was enough, and the muscular back under the cotton shirt. She recognized the old garments she had herself carried to him.

Far from being the starving wreck she had pictured, his cheek was full and ruddy, his whole body, notwithstanding the shamble he affected, was full of spring.

For an instant she thought they had taken him; but that was manifestly ridiculous. He was skylarking with the rest. His whole bearing was that of a leader among them.

Pen leaned against the fence post. A welter of emotions seemed to shatter her—joy, incredulity, terror that her wits might be wandering, anger at his careless air of well-being.

By and by she put up the bars mechanically, and started to walk along the road with a dazed air. She could not understand what had happened. Dusk was falling. In a couple of hundred yards a figure stepped out from the shadow of the bordering growth.

"Pen!" it whispered.

Her first reaction was to a shaking anger. She was almost beside herself. Stamping her foot in the road, she cried in a soft, strained voice:

"You, Don! Cutting up like a school-boy in the road! Is that all you have on your mind?"

He fell back a step, in surprise. Then he laughed softly, like the boy she accused him of being.

"But, Pen, aren't you glad?"

"Yes, laugh! Do!" she said bitterly. "It's nothing to you, what I've been through these last three days and nights!"

"I told you not to worry," he said sheepishly.

"Told me not to worry! What do you think I am?"

"There was no way in which I could let you hear from me. I thought you'd understand that everything was all right."

"You didn't care! You didn't care!"

He moved close to her.

"Pen dear, don't quarrel with me! We have only a moment. Even this is risky. There are more men coming along the road."

She attempted to push him away.

"Don't touch me! You're heartless and unfeeling!"

Even as she said it, she began to sob. She swayed on her feet, and Don flung an arm about her. She clung to him piteously.

"Oh, my darling, my darling! Thank God, I have you! Don't pay any attention to what I say. I have suffered so! I

was just at the end of my string. If I had not found you soon, I—I—"

"Hush, dearest!" he murmured, sobered and remorseful. "You mustn't say such things. I can't bear it! It's true I never thought. I had such confidence in your strength."

"I thought you were starving in the woods. I couldn't eat when I thought you had nothing! I couldn't sleep, seeing you lying there!"

"Hush! Hush!" he soothed her. "Everything is all right now. Pull yourself together, dearest. There are stragglers all along the road."

Indeed they could now hear footfalls coming along behind them. They started to walk, Don straining Pen hard against his side. Everybody was traveling the same way. Gradually Pen's breast quieted down.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"It means that I'm one of the searchers for Don Counsell," he said with a chuckle. "Only place they'd never think of looking for me!"

She looked at him, a little aghast.

"And I've made good in the job, too," he went on. "I'm considered quite a valuable man. Delehanty has put me in charge of a squad."

"Delehanty!" she gasped. "Do you mean you have spoken to him?"

"Why not? He doesn't know Don Counsell by sight. None of his men do. The only one who knows me is Riever, and I take good care to keep out of his way. Luckily it's easy. He doesn't bother with the roughnecks; and you can always see him a long way off when he comes with his gang."

"How did it come about?" she asked.

"Most natural thing in the world. My way is different from yours. You plan everything out, and I leave it to the inspiration of the moment. When I tried to get out by the cellar, that night, I heard a man down there. They had one out on the kitchen porch, too; so I took the screen out of the window on the other side, dropped to the ground, and hid in the shrubbery. I gradually made my way down to the beach. There were some natives camping there, but I was afraid to join them then, so I kept under cover until daylight. In the morning a raft of newcomers arrived from all over, and it was a simple matter to mix among them. They didn't all know one another."

"But you speak differently from these people," said Pen.

"Oh, I kept my mouth shut as much as possible. I gave out that I was Frank Jones, from New Jersey. That accounted for my Northern speech. I said I was off a coasting schooner. Meanwhile I've been practicing their lingo, and I can already speak Mar'land at least well enough to deceive Delehanty and the other Northerners. Dog-gone it, honey, Ah reckon Ah kin *tawk!* 'Deed, can I! Gemmen, it's tha *trewth!*"

Pen laughed down his neck.

"Every day that passes makes my position more secure," he said. "I'm becoming known—at least, Frank Jones is. This crop of saw-tooth is a wonderful disguise."

He softly rubbed his chin against her cheek. Pen liked it.

There came a hail from down the road ahead.

"Hey, Jones!"

They moved apart.

"Coming!" Don answered. "How can we meet?" he said to Pen. "Oh, woman, if you knew how I was hungering for you day and night!"

"No! No!" said Pen. "Everything's going so well. We mustn't take risks; but we ought to have some way of communicating with each other."

"Name it quick!"

She considered swiftly.

"Do you know my fattening coop, under the tree behind the kitchen?"

"I can find it."

"There's a little water pan inside it. Look under that for a letter."

"All right!" he laughed. "If I'm pinched for swiping chickens, you'll have to clear me!"

He ran down the road. Pen followed at a sober pace, still a little dazed.

XX

It was a justly aggrieved father that Pen found awaiting her in the dining room.

"Half past eight!" he said. "Where on earth have you been?"

Pen was quiet and starry-eyed with happiness. It didn't matter much to her what she said; but she rather wished to avoid a scene. She juggled with the truth a little.

"Mr. Delehanty wanted me to help him with the search."

"Delehanty! Wanted you!" he said, amazed.

It was too much for him.

"And Mr. Riever," Pen added as an afterthought.

The magic name mollified him a little.

"Ha! Well, if Riever knew! What suddenly started you off on this tack?"

"I want this business over with."

"I confess I fail to understand you," he said severely. "What help could you give them, anyway?"

"I know the place so well."

"Do you mean to say you have been searching the woods, with all these strangers about?"

"I had only to raise my voice to bring a dozen to my aid. Besides, Mr. Riever lent me a revolver."

"Oh! Well, you might have taken your father into your confidence. Did you find anything?"

"No."

A more perspicacious man might have remarked the little catch of joy with which she said it, but never Pendleton Broome.

"The supper is cold," he said fretfully. "Aunt Maria's gone home."

"Never mind!" said Pen. Out of the riches in her breast she could spare affection for him, the dear, trying child! She kissed his bald spot. "I'll make a cup of tea for myself."

"I got the mail this afternoon," he grumbled. "There's a letter for you."

"Eh?" said Pen sharply.

"On your plate. I never saw the handwriting before."

Pen glided swiftly around the table.

"I never saw it, either," she said—which was perfectly true.

It was a scrawling, half formed hand. The postmark "New York" told her all that she needed to know.

She thrust the letter carelessly in her belt, and went out into the kitchen. Pendleton looked affronted. He was terribly curious. Pen lit the oil stove and put the kettle on. Then she read her letter.

DEAR MISS:

I'm not much at writing. Please excuse mistakes. Well, Miss Broome, I guess you were right, all right. Everything bears out what you said. I and the fellows have made a good beginning, but we haven't cinched it yet by a good deal. Of course, in a job like this, you got to be absolutely bomb-proof before you put yourself under fire. I guess you get me. Just at present we're stalled for the lack of coin. I've raised every nickel I could among the fellows, and it's all gone flooey, and not a job stirring. We got to have five hundred quick. A thousand would be better. Bring it up

yourself. We got to have somebody to stop at a certain swell joint. None of us was able to get by with it. For God's sake get the money, if you have to purloin your old man's sock. Everything depends on your turning up with it the next day or so. No need for me to sign this.

A few minutes later Pendleton entered the kitchen, to find Pen leaning against the table in a brown study, the open letter in her hand. The kettle was boiling unheeded.

"Who's your letter from?" he asked.

"Oh, that!" said Pen, with a laugh. She was obliged to extemporize quickly. "Such an odd thing! Do you remember the little foundling that used to work for the Snellings on Absolom's Island? Something has led the child to write to me."

"Let's see," he said, holding out his hand.

"I can't, dad. The poor little thing is telling me her troubles."

"Humph!" snorted Pendleton, and passed on out of doors.

Pen carried her supper into the dining room. She sat, abstractedly stirring her cup, and munching a sandwich, while the same phrase ran around and around in her head.

"Got to have five hundred quick. A thousand would be better!"

Blanche might almost as well have asked her for a million, she thought, sighing.

By and by, having finished his chores, Pendleton came in again.

"Sit down a minute, dad," she said. "I want to talk to you."

Anticipating something unpleasant, he dropped into a chair, grumbling.

"This business has about finished me up," said Pen. "I must get away for a while."

"You're looking particularly well, to me," he said.

She refused to be drawn off.

"I don't know what to make of you," he went on crossly. "A while ago you were all for helping in the search."

"I hoped to end it," said Pen; "but I was unsuccessful."

Pendleton scowled sulkily at the table.

"You know what I want you to do," he muttered.

"That can wait," said Pen cautiously.

"You may not get the chance, later."

"I don't know that I have the chance now."

"Oh, let's talk plainly!" Pendleton burst out, still not meeting her eye. "This is no

time for false delicacy. Anybody could see that Riever wants you. He's given me to understand in the broadest way that you have only to say the word. Even after the extraordinary way you have acted, you still have a chance. What makes you hold back? You've got to marry somebody. Men are all much the same. Marriage is no bed of roses, at the best. Am I not your father? Would I be advising you to do anything that wasn't for your good? It's a wonderful chance, I tell you! And you talk about going away!"

The little man was almost ready to weep. Pen schooled herself to patience.

"If Mr. Riever is really in earnest, my going away will not make any difference. It's said to be a very good move," she added slyly.

"Not where a man like Riever is concerned!" cried Pendleton. "He's accustomed to be courted, to be deferred to. He'd never get over such an affront. He'd pull up anchor and sail away, never to return!"

"Ah, if he would!" Pen thought.

"What was in that letter you got?" demanded Pendleton. "Has that anything to do with it?"

Pen was startled. She saw, however, that it was merely a hit in the dark. He had no real suspicion. The best way was to ignore his question as unworthy of being answered.

"Won't you give me the money?" she said.

"Where am I going to get it?"

Pen was significantly silent.

"A while ago you would not touch that money with a poker!" he burst out.

"It is not easy to ask for it now," she murmured.

"How much do you want?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Pen, with her heart in her mouth.

"Five hundred dollars!" he stormed.

"Five hundred dollars! Why, you could go to your Cousin Laura Lee's and back for twenty!"

"Wherever I went, I would need clothes," said Pen.

"I offered you money for clothes, and you scorned it!"

"I'm sorry now. I have thought better of it."

"Oh, you have, have you? Well, permit me to remind you that the clothes were to wear here, and not to go away in!" He

started out of the room, blustering noisily to cover his retreat. "Five hundred dollars! To ruin your chances! Never heard of such folly! Never speak to me of this again! Five hundred dollars!"

He kept on talking all the way upstairs. Pen remained sitting at the table, looking at her empty hands.

She sat thinking and thinking, and stirring the tea, which had long ago turned cold. The only possible way she had of raising money was through the sale of her sheep. She had considered that once before. Her father would try to prevent her, of course. She might drive them up the Neck road at night, and put them on the steamboat from one of the wharves on the bay; but Delehanty's men were watching the road at a dozen points.

In her perplexity, Pen felt a great longing to consult with Don. Two heads were better than one, she told herself. Perhaps the truth was that she just wanted to be with him. She was thankful she had made an arrangement to communicate. In the ordinary course he could hardly expect a letter from her until the next day; but, thinking of his boyish eagerness, she considered it possible that he might come back that night on the chance of hearing from her. At any rate, it was worth trying.

She got a scrap of paper and a pencil, and wrote four lines:

I must see you. I'll put on an old dress and a sunbonnet, and walk on the beach, near the light-house, at eleven o'clock. If you don't get this to-night, I'll come to-morrow night.

Pen put this into the agreed place, and returned to the house, wondering how she would put in the hour and a half that remained before eleven. She decided to watch for Don. That would be easier than trying to distract her mind; so she went upstairs rather noisily, and came down again very quietly, carrying with her what she needed for her disguise.

She took up her position on a chair in the dark kitchen, placed against the wall in such a way that she could look obliquely through the window in the direction of her chicken coop. The moon was not up yet, and it was pitch dark under the tree. She could see nothing, but she was sure that no one could visit the spot without her being aware of it.

After all, she dozed. She had had little enough sleep of late; and now that the most

pressing weight was lifted from her breast, the night laid a finger on her eyelids without her being aware of it. The katydids, the crickets, the distant murmur of the waves on the bay shore, gradually undermined her wakefulness. Her head swayed against the wall.

She awakened, scarcely knowing that she had slept. Somebody was outside—she was electrically conscious of it, though for a moment she could hear nothing. Then a soft, masculine chuckle came out of the dark. There was more than one, evidently, for men do not as a rule chuckle when alone.

"Dog-goned if it ain't a coop, fellas!" a voice whispered. "What say to a nice fat pullet for breakfast?"

It suddenly came to her this was Don's voice, with his exaggerated Maryland drawl. Her heart beat fast.

"Watch yourself, Jones!" answered another voice. "Those damned birds 'll raise the dead if you lay hand to them!"

"On'y one squawk before I get her neck wrung," laughed Don. "I got the lay of the land. That whitewashed fence yonder marks the garden. Run down the rows to the next fence, and you're safe!"

A silence followed. Pen, straining her ears, heard, or imagined that she heard, the latch softly raised, the door opened, and the little pan softly moved inside. Then Don's voice again:

"By golly! It's empty!"

The words were spoken in the conventional tone of disappointment, but Pen, and none but Pen, could hear the thrilling little lift in his voice. She was assured that the note was tight clasped in his hand. The voices moved away.

Pen cautiously consulted her watch. It was half past ten. She must start at once, in order to keep her appointment, for she must take a roundabout and difficult way.

Pendleton Broome's snores were resounding through the house, and in the back hall, where the light could not betray her out of doors, she lit a little lamp and arrayed herself. She had a black cotton servant's dress, which had been designed to fit a more ample figure than hers. She put it on, and stuffed it out with old cotton until her shape was altered beyond recognition. Drawing her hair straight back from her face, she twisted it into a tight knot behind, and pulled the sunbonnet over her head. For the dark it was a sufficiently effective disguise.

Slipping out of the back door, she made her way to the old paddock behind the house grounds. Gaining the road from here, she climbed a fence on the other side, and struck across the little triangular field for the woods. It was the way she had gone once before to meet Don.

Forcing her way through the undergrowth, she gained her own path, and so reached the little temple. From this point she struck out a line that would bring her out on the bay shore. The sound of the waves guided her. When she had gone a little way, she began to catch glimpses of the Broome's Point light between the tree trunks, and that gave her an exact course.

This part of the woods was densely grown up, and it was hard, slow going. She had to feel her way through the tangle, and the thorns scratched her hands and tore her dress. She put her foot into unsuspected holes, and came down heavily. It was only a couple of hundred yards, but she could progress but a foot at a time. It seemed as if an age passed before she slid down the steep bank and gained the sand.

From around the point she heard six bells sounded melodiously aboard the Alexandra. She broke into a run. The tide was falling, and there was firm footing along the water's edge.

The lighthouse stood on its spidery stilts only a hundred feet or so off the beach. As she came close, Pen could make out old Weems Locket, the keeper, standing on the little gallery that encircled his octagonal house, with a companion. The two were leaning on the rail, looking out across the bay, and smoking cigars. Even if they had looked in her direction, they could scarcely have seen her, for her black dress was lost against the bushes that bordered the sand.

There was a fresh breeze off the water, which swallowed slight sounds. The first narrow edge of a smoky, orange moon was rising out of the bay.

Pen breathed more freely after rounding the point. The old wharf was now about a quarter of a mile in front of her. The natives were camped on the beach on both sides of the wharf. As she approached, Pen could see the fires burning low in front of the tents, but no figures stirring. On board the Alexandra lights still shone from the deck house windows.

Not daring to go close to the tents, Pen came to a stand about a furlong away. There was no sign of Don; but presently

she heard somebody coming from the other direction, the way she had herself come—some one softly whistling a tune. Thinking she must have passed him somehow, she turned eagerly.

On this side of the point the rising moon was hidden behind the intervening high ground. A figure emerged out of the murk, and Pen instantly perceived that it was not Don. It was too late to escape.

"A skirt!" exclaimed a rough young voice. "What are you doing out so late, sister?"

He spread out his arms to bar her way.

"Let me by!" murmured Pen.

"Wait a minute! Let's have a squint at you!"

He lit a match with his thumb nail. Quick as thought, Pen blew out the flame.

The young fellow laughed. Pen tried to dart by him. He flung out an arm and gathered her in. She struggled in silent desperation.

"Young and supple as willow, I swear!" laughed the man. "What you got so much clothes on for? Gee, you smell as sweet as honeysuck!"

Pen beat his face with her clenched fists. He simply lowered his head, laughing, and clung to her. She had a sickening feeling of helplessness, and she dared not call for help.

It was all over in half a minute, or less. She heard running footsteps from the direction of the camp, and felt herself suddenly released.

The newcomer was Don.

"What's this?" he cried, with an oath that startled Pen—and charmed her.

"Hell! I didn't know it was your property, Jones," the other man said sullenly.

"Damn you!"

Pen apprehended a blow about to be given. As in a flash, the ghastly consequences of a fight were revealed to her. She flung her arms around Don, and clung to him without speaking. He understood. He conquered his rage with a groan.

"Well—get out!" he said thickly.

The other man melted away into the dark.

XXI

PEN and Don clung to each other. Of the two, the man was the more shaken. Moments passed before he could speak.

"Oh, my girl! My girl!" he said at length.

"It is nothing," Pen said. "I am not made of glass."

"My fault, because I was late!" he groaned. "I couldn't get rid of those fellows I was with."

"I am safe," Pen said. "Forget about it. I have something to tell you. There is little time."

They started to walk slowly away from the camp. Pen repeated Blanche Paglar's letter to him, word for word. It arrested his attention, and he quieted down. When they found themselves drawing too near the lighthouse, they turned and came slowly back, Don straining Pen against his side.

When she had described her problem, Don said instantly:

"There's just one thing to do—you must give me up to Riever at once, and collect the reward."

Pen's breast contracted sharply. She bitterly blamed herself. Why had she not foreseen that this was what he would say? She couldn't answer.

"How about it?" he asked.

"I couldn't!" she murmured.

"But if it's the best thing to do?"

"I simply couldn't!"

"Listen, dearest—we must think this thing clean through to the end. These people in New York seem to have started something. Well, that being so, this seems to me as good an opportunity as any for me to come out and put up my fight."

"I must find out first how much they've learned."

"She says it's not complete, but they've started something. They seem to be on the level with us. We must back them up before the trail grows cold."

"I think I could find another way of raising the money."

"I'd rather use Riever's money," he said dryly. "I've got to stand trial, anyhow. It will take a whole lot of money, and I don't see any other way of raising it. There'd be a sort of poetic justice in making Riever pay the expenses of my trial; but we must act quickly. He's bound to find out that you and I are working together, and then he'd never pay you the reward."

"How could I bring myself to do such a thing?"

"Wait a minute! Suppose we do nothing, what will happen? Oh, I'm in no particular danger now. In a few days they'll get sick of this search and give it up. I

can see signs of it coming. Well, I can go back to the Eastern Shore with the fellows I'm chumming with, and get clean away. I've a new identity all established. But what then? What sort of a life would I have? I should be a sort of *Wandering Jew* without a friend in the world, except you, and I wouldn't dare to communicate with you. I'd be one of the miserable floaters who have to do the dirtiest work for the least pay. God, when you are really on the outs of things, you're up against it! You're at the bottom of a pit with smooth walls!"

"Wherever you were I would be," she whispered.

"I wouldn't take you!" he said simply. "Not that! Not unless we could hold our heads up!"

"How could I do it?" murmured poor Pen. "How could I make my lips shape the words?"

"But if it was I you were doing it for, dearest?"

Slowly pacing up and down, cheek to cheek, they endlessly and lovingly disputed the question, without being able to come to a conclusion. In their deep preoccupation they became careless. The slab-sided moon rose over the high bank, and shone upon them full, but they gave no heed.

The edge of the beach was bordered with the brittle, woody bushes that the natives call waterweed. Pen and Don had paused in their pacing, and were standing looking into each other's faces with their clasped hands between them. Suddenly, from behind a clump of bushes immediately alongside them, rose the figure of a man. He was silhouetted against the moon with a significant raised arm.

"Hands up, Counsell!" he cried. "I got you covered!"

Don acted like a lightning flash. With a thrust of his arms he sent Pen reeling backward. She fell in the sand. At the same instant Don dived low through the bushes and caught the other man around the legs. He measured his length in the sand. It was so quick that he did not even fire. The pistol flew out of his hand. Pen, following a blind instinct, scrambled on her hands and knees and secured it.

Don had flung himself on the other man, and they were struggling furiously and silently in the sand. Don kept on top.

When Pen's eyes were able to distinguish them, she saw that Don was planted on the

other man's chest, holding one of his arms down with one hand, and pressing his other hand over the man's mouth. With his free hand the man struck ineffectually at Don's body, or tried in vain to pull away the hand that covered his mouth. His legs were thrashing wildly.

"Something to gag him with!" panted Don.

Pen tore off her sunbonnet, and, rolling it up with the strings out, handed it over. She sat on the man's right arm, when Don was obliged to release it. Somehow Don managed to force the twisted roll of cotton between the prisoner's teeth. With Pen's aid, he passed the strings under the man's head and tied the gag with the knots in front.

Sepulchral groans issued from beneath it. "Something to tie his hands and feet!" whispered Don.

Pen, anticipating it, already had her apron off. She managed to tear off the band, which, with the strings attached, made a useful lashing. Between the two of them they got the struggling man turned over, and finally got his wrists tied behind him. With the rest of the apron they bound his ankles together.

Don rolled his coat around the man's head, to stifle his groans, and they stood up and looked anxiously up and down the beach. They were about halfway between the lighthouse and the tents. Nothing stirred in either direction.

Don looked down at the helpless figure.

"Who do you suppose it is?" he asked.

"Keesing, one of the detectives," said Pen. "I recognized his voice. He must have followed me down here; but I don't see how he could."

Don shook his head.

"More likely Pardoe, the man you ran into here, told him something, and he came snooping around just on a chance. I gave myself away with my own talk!"

They were silent for a moment. Both were thinking of the same thing.

"Well," said Don, "I guess the die is cast for us now."

Pen clasped her hands.

"Oh, Don!"

"You've got to march me out on board the yacht, quick, and give me up."

"Oh, Don!"

"This fellow will soon wriggle loose. Then the fat will be in the fire. You must see there's no other way."

She nodded despairingly.

"Come on!" said Don. "I guess Riever won't mind being roused up for such a purpose," he added grimly. "Bring the fellow's gun with you."

They set off down the beach.

"This man will tell Riever that I didn't intend to bring you in," said Pen.

"We'll have to cook up some yarn. Tell Riever that you were bringing me in when this fellow Keesing tried to horn in on the reward."

There was no sound of waking life about the tents. On the beach in front, all sorts and sizes of skiffs were drawn up. They chose the first one that had oars lying in it. The falling tide had left it high and dry, and it required a strenuous effort on Don's part to launch it.

At the scraping of the bottom on the sand, a voice issued out of the nearest tent:

"Who's that?"

A lean and disheveled shadow appeared in the tent opening.

"It's Jones," said Don lightly. "Just want to take a lady for a little row."

"Oh, all right, Jones! Go as far as you like."

"I'm popular with the gang!" murmured Don dryly.

He had only three hundred yards to row to the yacht. It was one thing to decide resolutely to give himself up, and another thing to put it into practice. He took a half a dozen strokes energetically, and then loafed at the oars, gazing hungrily at Pen.

Pen, suddenly conscious of the absurd figure she must be making, put up her hands, and, unpinning her hair, shook it about her shoulders. Don drew in his oars, and, creeping aft, caught up the dark tide and pressed it to his lips.

"Oh, why do you do that now?" he groaned. "You are so beautiful that way!"

Pen caught his hand against her breast.

"How can I? How can I? How can I?" she murmured.

Don, with a sigh, went back to his oars.

With a twist or two, Pen put up her hair in more becoming fashion. She began to pull out the various lengths of cotton with which she had stuffed out her bodice, and dropped them overboard.

Don, the irrepressible, began to laugh shakily. Pen gasped — and laughed, too. They looked at each other and laughed softly until they felt weak.

"Is that all?" asked Don at last.

Fishing around inside her dress, Pen nodded.

"Well, I'm relieved," he said.

"Oh, but it's dreadful to laugh now!" Pen murmured remorsefully.

"It's the only thing to do," said Don simply.

He was sober enough when they touched the side of the yacht. He made the skiff's painter fast to the grating at the foot of the ladder. Then, stepping out, he drew Pen up beside him.

"Kiss me," he whispered. "It may be the last!"

A murmur of pain was forced from Pen's breast.

"I mean for a good while," he hastily added.

They clung together. His face was wet from hers.

The sound of a footfall on the deck overhead caused them to draw apart quickly.

"Take the gun in your hand," Don whispered.

They went up the ladder, Don in advance. On the deck an astonished watchman faced them.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I am Miss Broome," said Pen. "I want to see Mr. Riever."

"He's turned in, miss."

In order to avoid frightening the man unduly, Pen kept the pistol hidden in a fold of her skirt.

"He must be awakened," she said. "It is important."

Like everybody else on board the yacht, the watchman had gathered, from watching his master, that Pen was a person to be propitiated.

"I'll tell him," he said, and disappeared within the deck house.

Left alone on deck, Pen and Don leaned over the rail, pressing their shoulders together, and gazed down at the black water etched with phosphorescence where the little waves lapped against the vessel's side and rolled back again.

"I love you!" Don whispered. "Whatever happens, you have made my life worth living!"

Pen caught her breath.

"Ah, don't speak," she murmured, "or I shan't be able to go through with it!"

They felt for each other's hands.

They had not to wait long. They saw Riever coming through the lighted deck saloon before he could see them. The watchman accompanied him, and another man, a sort of valet and bodyguard. Riever was wearing a gorgeous orange-flowered dressing gown. His face looked pufferly than by day, but his thin hair was carefully brushed. He had an expression of oddly strained eagerness.

As they came through the door, one of the men turned a switch, and the deck was flooded with light. Riever's sharpened gaze flew first to Pen's face, and from Pen to Don. For a fraction of a second he did not recognize Counsell.

"Hello, Ernest!" Don said coolly.

Then Riever knew. His face became convulsed.

"Counsell!" he cried in a high, strained voice. He whirled on the watchman. "Blow your whistle! Rouse the ship!"

The shrill, wailing sound pierced the night.

Half beside himself, Riever cried to Don: "You fox! I've run you to earth at last!"

"You didn't," said Don, smiling at him steadily.

"Well, you're caught! You're done for now!"

(To be concluded in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

IN PALMYRA

In Palmyra a tomb there stands
Of one they called the Strong of Hands.

In Palmyra there stands a tomb
Of one they named the Rose in Bloom.

Their crumbled forms rest side by side,
The bridegroom and his flower-fair bride.

Fleet was their bliss—a bright, brief day;
Yet love lives on for aye and aye!

Sennett Stephens

The White Lights

WHAT JOHN RENEKER FOUND WHEN HE CAME BACK TO
BROADWAY AFTER BEING DEAD FOR TWO YEARS

By Charles Divine

NIGHT had fallen when John Reneker stepped over the side of the freighter and stood on a Hoboken dock with only a dollar in his pocket. From a lantern elevated above the stringpiece a soft glow fell upon his tall figure, on his faded felt hat—champagne-colored when bought in Marseilles, but now burned gray by Sahara suns and desert sands. Beneath the brim his steady eyes, beginning to wrinkle at the corners, regarded long and lovingly the lamp-lit isle on the other side of the Hudson.

Nostalgia had brought him back from Africa. He wondered what it was going to feel like to walk in the cañons of New York again, in the streets beneath the merchant castles where the famous "white lights" sparkled. That was the thrill that had excited all his thoughts as he crossed the ocean.

His pleasant, well-formed mouth widened slowly into a grim smile, wistful and ironic. Yes, New York had called him back, he reflected, but what a difference!

Five years ago he had stridden through the great city's crowds, at home among their tumult and their terror, and he had begun to make a name for himself as a writer. That had been forgotten, of course, during the years of the war, in a community faithful only to names constantly advertised. Now he must begin the battle all over again—at thirty, with only the terror remaining.

He straightened his shoulders and turned into a street along the water front, seeking the tube entrance. He would close his eyes to New York's lights until he came up again on the other side, with the splendor bursting over him in sudden magic.

"That ought to have a kick in it!" he promised himself.

At the entrance of the Lackawanna station he came face to face with another young man, who sought to avoid him in his haste, and, by so doing, swerved directly into his own diverging path. The other looked at him casually—and stepped back with a cry.

At the same instant Reneker's eyes lit with pleasure at the recognition of an old friend—a figure full-chested and energetic, a face whose rubicund joviality had often enlivened his former days. His hand shot out impulsively.

"Russell Ward! Well, I'll be—"

His words broke off abruptly, his hand halted in mid air. The other was gazing at him aghast, his face as white as paper.

"What's the matter, Russ? Am I so changed?"

The color came slowly back to his friend's face, but his voice sounded hoarse.

"Alive!" he exclaimed, seizing the outstretched hand. "Really alive—John Reneker?"

His agitation struck Reneker with surprise and wonder.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You've been dead two years, and your body has just been brought back to this country!"

"Oh, I see! Facetious as ever. For a minute you gave me a scare, looking at me like that." Reneker laughed. "Yes, I brought my body back on a tramp steamer, though my soul may have been traveling first class on the Paris, with a bottle of good sauterne in the smoking room."

"No, no, it's not that," continued Ward breathlessly, with no lessening of the awe in his face. "You have actually been reported dead. It was in the newspapers two years ago—how you were killed in Italy, in a railroad accident. Didn't you know?"

It was Reneker's turn to stare astounded. "I was demobilized in Italy and went to Algeria. They don't deliver newspapers in the desert."

Ward's hand fell on his arm, tightly.

"You're supposed to have died a hero, rescuing wounded soldiers in a railroad wreck. You were buried over there, and now the government has brought your body back. A shipload of them has just arrived in Hoboken. That's why I'm here—to see about my brother. The coffins are laid out on a dock, and I've been looking at them."

"Wait a minute!" begged Reneker, dazed. His mind began to race violently. "A railroad wreck, you say? I—I do remember a journey to the coast, and the American who wanted to look at my identification disk, made by an Italian silversmith. I wore it on my wrist, and the strange handiwork attracted the fellow's attention. He asked to see it. I handed it to him, and—let's see—yes, I left the compartment and walked to the end of the car, to the drinking fountain. Then the train stopped at a little station, and I jumped off to get some cigarettes. While I was disputing with a piratical cigarette dealer, the train went on—and left me. I remember that there were two cars full of convalescents, and I heard that the train was wrecked farther on; but that's all I know about it. The next day I was on a boat sailing across the Mediterranean."

"And the fellow who had your identification tag—"

"Must have been taken for me!"

"But wouldn't he have had some papers of his own?"

"Yes, he should have, but I've always suspected he was a deserter. I couldn't get him to talk about his army experiences."

For a moment both were silent.

"It's too late to get him to talk now," Ward said. "He lies in a coffin bearing your name. If I had time, I'd go back and show you, but I'm due in New York at eight o'clock, and it's five minutes to eight now. You can find your way alone."

Reneker was lost in thought.

"Why do they bring bodies back, anyway?" he said finally. "I suppose the undertakers favor it—for sentimental reasons. That poor devil who lies in my coffin—I feel as if I were cheating his family. People enjoy their grief so much!"

"Still cynical, eh? But maybe you're right. Anyway, there was a charming

young woman making arrangements for the disposal of your coffin, and she seemed to be very much interested in you. A silver casket, and a tomb on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson, I heard her say. Lucky dog! That's somebody worth coming back to, I'll say!"

"You mean it?" Reneker looked puzzled. "I have no family, no wife, no—anything."

"What?" cried Ward, astonished. "But there was a young woman, I tell you, and she went away in a limousine. I heard her tell the chauffeur to hurry, or she'd be late for the theater. Some lady bountiful, perhaps, taking pity on an orphaned hero."

"Vicarious sorrow, you mean? Romantic charity?"

"Whatever that means." Ward smiled and held out his hand. "Got to run along, John. Haven't been in New York in two years myself. Been in Arizona, drilling for oil. Call me up some day soon—Cornell Club. So long!"

II

WARD hurried away, leaving Reneker standing plunged in abstraction. Not only had he come back to New York with a single dollar in his pocket, and with his career to start all over again, but worse than that—he had come back a dead man!

Pondering, he walked along the docks until he came to the shed where the coffins were ranged in long rows, draped with American flags; but the guard at the gate refused to let him enter.

"Was this John Reneker a friend of yours?"

Reneker hesitated.

"Well—sometimes."

"Then you ought to have a permit. Otherwise you're out o' luck."

The guard turned away.

Reneker smiled. Not only had he come back dead, but he could not even see his own coffin! Young minds make poetic stuff out of death, and Reneker had often dreamed of a final resting place on the Palisades; but that any one should have known of this, and acted upon it, was fantastic, supernatural. The mystery of it amused him at the same time that its hopelessness saddened him.

He had heard of dead soldiers coming back, turning up melodramatically, to find their wives married again. His own situation, he reflected, was barren of such a ca-

tastrophe. For an instant his mind, racing along from subject to subject, recalled a stenographer with a pathetically comical name who had once worked over his manuscripts, charming him with her warm eyes and baffling him with her speech.

"There might have been a romance there," he sighed.

It would have made a better story. As it was, he had no sweetheart, not even a love letter that hadn't been outlawed by the years of vagabondage.

At the uptown terminus of the tube he climbed out into a nocturnal atmosphere that dazzled him like artificial daylight—a street brilliant, animated, tumultuous, full of sound and fury, signifying Broadway. It seemed a lifetime since he had set his face against this onslaught of opulence and activity. His cheeks tingled, his blood raced faster. He stopped to look around, like a stranger in a new world; but a man emerging from behind bumped into him, followed by other precipitate beings who swept him along, entangled in the current of their haste.

Over the street hung a white fog, the cobalt-blue haze of gasoline fumes saturated with light. Reneker halted on the curb, stunned by the glaring spectacle, surprised at his discovery.

"You could read a book here—even the Bible," he mused; "but you'd probably be arrested."

Crowds were moving in antlike continuity, the same crowds he had known years ago, only now they were more numerous, more noisy. After the music of Mediterranean tongues, the speech of Manhattan fell upon his ears shrill and loud.

Then he looked at their faces, and was astonished. He saw a tawdry alteration in them—faces growing uglier and more strained, features badly chiseled, mouths slack or grim, eyes sordid with the glint of a relentless selfishness deforming them. The physiognomy of New York was changing, he thought.

At the corner of Forty-First Street he stopped again, struck by the sight of an aged woman selling newspapers. She sat in a doorway beside a scanty display of papers, her appearance in pathetic contrast with her occupation. Her gray hair was hidden under an ornate, floppy hat. Her cheeks were pitifully rouged. She wore an ancient satin gown bedecked with all manner of embroidered finery. She smiled

vapidly at the passers-by, and pointed at her newspapers.

"Good God!" breathed Reneker. "She was there when I went away—the same spot—the same lace collar!"

The sight moved him. She, too, had failed to go up in the world with the recent years. He dropped a dollar bill toward her hand. Amazement held her faded eyes on the object in her lap until he had vanished in the passing crowd.

In Times Square he felt the city's stimulation stirring in him again, its infectious movement and feverishly wrought splendor. Everywhere sparkled electric lights like stars dropped from an exotic heaven, tinsel playthings for street and curb and face, magnified in a blazing nearness, clustered in glorious agglomeration. Above the roofs various brands of underwear, hair nets, and cigarettes were advertised in points of flame, while below surged the people who smoked the cigarettes and became entangled in the hair nets.

It thrilled Reneker to be once more in contact with these millions of human beings. It was a life gargantuan, galvanic, mad, exaggerating its own importance.

A man couldn't stand still for long in that spot, with the city propelling him headlong like a shock. He began to hurry westward along Forty-Second Street, toward the theaters that had always held such fascination for him. He walked as if he, too, had a destination in mind.

His impatience carried him across Seventh Avenue with quickened footsteps. A restaurant window caught his eye:

Engagement Extraordinary of the only Girl Jazz Band in Town—Six Queens of Syncopation

He smiled thoughtfully.

"That's you, New York—an engagement extraordinary! I wonder when the manager will close the house!"

Ahead of him shone the lighted entrance of the theaters, with glass awnings extending to the curb, canopied the sidewalk in a lane of winking, intermittent lights, moving evanescently around framed signs, gold, saffron, orange, and blue, like the spangled serpents he had seen crawling on the hot African sands.

Suddenly he stopped abruptly and stood stock still, his figure alert, his eyes fixed on a sign in front of him. It was as if it had touched a mechanism in his body, petrifying all muscular action.

He stared at the words outlined in glittering lights, utterly astounded.

JOHN RENEKER'S

Great American Play

"The Overgrown Village"

He wiped his hand shakily across his eyes. The city gargantuan, mad!

Yet the white lights remained; he could not brush the vision away. John Reneker's name flared over the street, and John Reneker gazed at it and gasped.

"That sign?"

He roughly seized a man by the arm.

"Yes—Reneker's play. Damned good. Go see it. 'Overgrown Village'—I lived in one for twenty years, and I ought to know!"

III

THE man passed on and left him still dazed. He felt the sweat under his hat. Was there another John Reneker who wrote plays?

He remembered now that one of his last manuscripts written before going abroad had been a play, but it had been lost in the offices of an agency. It had dealt with life in an up-State town, but he had called it "City Fear." Could there be some strange, incomprehensible relation between "The Overgrown Village" and his own long lost play, which had been rejected a dozen times before the agency notified him of its ultimate disappearance?

At once the impatience which the city had poured into him became a personal force, subjective and dynamic, causing him to hurry forward to the entrance of the theater. Groups of men were issuing from the lobby, lighting cigarettes during an intermission. He stopped in front of the placards paneled on the walls, depicting scenes from the play.

There was a striking tableau of a girl confronting an older couple in an old-fashioned sitting room. There was a picture of a corner in a public library. Like a flash, scenes from his own play leaped into his mind, familiar echoes, animating the photographed pantomime at which he was looking. Yes, these were unmistakably the characters of his play, these were its dramatic situations.

But what did all this mean, this stupefying phantasy that looked like some incredible coincidence? He stepped farther into

the lobby, confronting a huge portrait in which he stared into his own eyes. It was a portrait of himself, a photograph taken in his army uniform, which he had sent back to a friend on a newspaper.

So it was his play! A forgotten dream of fame and footlights, intoxicatingly true—or was there still deceit?

A bell rang, and the smokers surged past him into the theater. It was the last act, he heard one of them say.

A fever of excitement seized upon him, urging him to get inside at once and see what was taking place on the stage. Yet even as he moved toward the box office, with no money in his pocket, he realized that the story he had to tell in exchange for admission was fantastic beyond the ken of prosaic treasures.

"No, madam." The treasurer was speaking into the telephone. "We're sold out five weeks in advance. Sorry!"

Reneker's glance, falling on a sign beside the window, twinkled oddly.

"Count your change before leaving window," the sign warned him.

The treasurer turned to him. Reneker's hands gripped the marble window ledge as he told his story. The official regarded him curiously through the bars; he was a sleek gentleman fond of his diamond stick pin and his sophistication.

"Say, I've had an earful of bunk from deadheads trying to beat their way into this house for the last ten years, but never a story like yours!" He turned away sarcastically. "First time I ever heard a deadhead pick on a dead author. That wins the brown derby!"

Reneker waited vainly at the window—an author unable to see his own play. He hoped that the laughter would subside, and that the scornful gentleman would listen to his protestations; but the other was talking to somebody else in the office about a "snow bird" who thought he was a dead playwright. At Reneker's insistence, he came back to the window belligerently.

"Give yourself the air, or I'll call a cop!" he ordered. "Try that stuff of yours next door. They're playing 'Macbeth.'"

Reneker drifted thoughtfully toward the street, wondering what fabrication he could evolve to gain an entrance which truth had failed to attain. His brain tingled with the task of inciting his wits to immediate strategy, till at length he whirled about and started determinedly for the swinging doors.

The doorman was startled by his violent speech, the evident emotion of a young man undergoing great stress.

"My wife's up in the balcony—I know right where she is. There's something happened at the house, an' I got to see her—I got to!"

The doorman fell back, visibly affected by the hint of tragedy brought so close to him. Reneker glided over the soft carpets into the dark theater.

"Bourgeois melodrama!" he commented to himself, smiling.

Upstairs in the balcony he found a bench against the wall, with a view straight down a central aisle to the stage. The lighted scene drew his eye, entranced. In a lamp-lit sitting room an old foggy was winding the clock and reminding his wife that it was time to put the cat out and go to bed.

At that moment the door burst open, and a radiant girl entered. She was all beauty and breathless. Reneker leaned forward, tense, straining his ears to catch her rebellious words.

"Do you think I've ever lived in this sordid little town, this overgrown village, where everybody watches his neighbor, waiting to see if he will sin, and hoping he will? No, I've lived in a tower with the door shut, and I'll never open it here!"

Listening to the impulsive words that continued to fall from her lips, Reneker recognized lines that he had written long ago, bringing him a sensation of electric communication, as if his ideas were passing into hers, her sympathies in turn launching themselves toward his thoughts with the warmth of a handclasp.

Eagerly he drank in her words. He found her interpreting the rôle with a comprehension of its subtleties that brought him a shock of surprise, as if she sensed the unwritten heart throbs between the lines. Her voice, her face, her gestures, were all as he had dreamed them. It was uncanny. It thrilled him with a pleasure suspending all time, until a hand fell on his arm startlingly.

"Have you a check, sir?"

It was an usher, a girl in maid's garb.

He waved his hand toward the front row indefinitely.

"I should be down there; but have you ever sat next to a man who ate garlic for dinner?"

"All right! I understand."

She nodded and vanished.

His gaze returned to the stage, and to the lithe figure of the heroine, whose movements laid hold of his senses like the memory of a dream girl.

He found a program and looked for her name. Lucretia Snow—it was new to him.

Slowly, yet with inevitable momentum, the drama of small town pettiness rose to its *dénouement* and sank to its close. The curtain's fall was followed by applause. Reneker sat staring straight ahead of him, as if he still saw the girl standing behind the footlights, head upflung gloriously, arms outstretched, and a gleam as of starlight in her eyes.

People passing, and putting on coats and wraps, roused him from his trance in time to find the theater almost empty. Slowly he got to his feet and moved down the stairway toward the open doors. At one side he discerned the treasurer in conversation with a man in a dinner coat—Theodore Blake, the manager, a man with massive shoulders, head erect, face spiritually ascetic, with long, thin nose and deep, gray eyes, all familiar to Reneker through photographs of this successful producer who was famous for his artistic eccentricities.

At Reneker's approach, the treasurer gave a start and spoke hurriedly to Blake. Then he turned to Reneker with a sneer.

"Thought you were gettin' away with something? I'll call a cop, Mr. Blake!"

He darted through the door.

Reneker paid no heed to him. Instead, he faced the manager's ironic gaze.

"What I told him was the truth—that I am John Reneker, mistakenly reported dead, and that I returned to New York to-night after two years in Africa. Surely, sir, you will give me a chance to prove my identity! At least you must admit that there's a resemblance." He pointed to a picture on the wall. "A uniform makes a difference—and that mustache I left behind in Milan."

The manager's eyes traveled keenly from the man to the picture and back again, several times, while Reneker waited breathlessly for an answer.

"You say you were in Africa—"

"I might as well have been buried, for all the news that ever reached me." Reneker drew a memorandum book from his pocket. "Here is the original of that picture—an official army photograph, as you see, signed by me and countersigned by my colonel. Good Heavens, sir, I know my

own play! I know it backward. You must have cut Miss Snow's speech in the last act, and you have added the business of knocking over the lamp, where I had the wind do it. Don't you see, Mr. Blake? The rest is about as I wrote it—except the title. How did you come to produce it? They told me that it was lost."

The manager's eyes were growing wide, his scrutiny keen. At that moment the treasurer returned, accompanied by a bulky policeman swinging a night stick. Reneker stood motionless, waiting, his fists clenching unconsciously.

Then Blake dismissed the policeman and turned upon the treasurer with startling abruptness.

"I don't want a policeman!" he cried fiercely. "I want Higgins, the press agent! Why don't you use your head?"

The other lost countenance before this spirited attack upon his sophistication.

"Don't stand there looking like a collar ad! Show some signs of intelligence! Get Higgins on the phone. Here's a story that will put the show on the front page of every paper in town!"

The treasurer made haste to obey.

"Thank you," said Reneker.

"Don't thank me!" retorted Blake. "I'll be thanking you for two or three thousand dollars' worth of free advertising. As for the credit for producing your play—if it is yours—it all belongs to Lucretia Snow."

"I must see her!"

There was an intensity in Reneker's voice that caused Blake to look at him sharply.

"You shall."

IV

BLAKE led the way down a side aisle that brought them out among the wings of the stage, where they dodged a group of hands striking a set. The door to which Reneker followed him excitedly was opened by a maid who had been in the act of putting a shoe tree into a slipper, which she now held in her hand.

"Tell Miss Snow I am here," said Blake; "with another man."

"Come in, Mr. Blake!" sounded a voice which Reneker recognized with a thrill.

As they entered the room, he saw a slender figure in a black velvet gown seated at a dressing table before a mirror framed in electric bulbs. Behind her the walls were

concealed by cretonne hangings, and the same bright material covered the chair backs. A wardrobe trunk stood on end in a corner, where the maid was putting clothes away.

Reneker's eyes, however, rested only on the young woman at the dressing table. She was bending over it, writing on a piece of paper, while in her left hand she held a nail buffer, as if she had but that moment delayed its use in order to take up the pencil with which she was scribbling so seriously. He could see the curve of her cheek and the profile of her beautiful features.

"Just a moment, Mr. Blake," she begged, without looking up. "I want to finish this line. It's not a testimonial for a cold cream; it's a telegram to my mother."

Almost immediately she finished writing and turned around.

"Here is a gentleman," announced Blake, stepping aside, "who says he is John Reneker, the author of the play."

A smile half humorous and wholly incredulous flickered in her face as she swung around in her chair. Then she looked up at the younger man, and the smile faded. A pallor swept into her cheeks.

Reneker found himself gazing, fascinated, into a pair of brown and boundless eyes. The same uncanny feeling he had felt while watching the girl's movements on the stage returned now as he looked into her eyes, flaming with a strange light.

Her figure stiffened. She stared up at him, dumfounded, the nail buffer clutched rigidly in her hand.

"John Reneker!" she repeated, drawn slowly to her feet, entranced.

Her gaze remained fixed on his face with such abstraction that the manager stood spellbound in the doorway, watching the two confront each other. In the corner the maid paused, looking on, with a gown half-way to its hanger.

Then Reneker spoke.

"Yes. Is it hard to believe?"

At the sound of his voice Miss Snow caught her breath, and the buffer fell from her hand.

"It is! It is!" she cried, with an exultant tremor in her voice.

Suddenly Reneker's heart jumped. A familiar magic lay upon her, glorifying the dream girl illusion. A light broke over him, and he stepped forward with outstretched hand, exclaiming:

"I know you now—Lucy Snooks! No wonder you changed your name, you whose typewriter lifted me out of the quagmires of semicolons."

"Oh!"

She leaped forward and seized his hand, radiant.

"John Reneker!" she continued. "Just as you used to come to me at the agency in the depths of despondency and punctuation." She laughed hysterically. "But how—what—oh, to think that this should happen to me!" The elation in her voice rang high. "Tell me about it," she added. "I'm bewildered!"

Sharing her excitement, Reneker told her as briefly as he could, while Blake looked on beaming, and the maid entirely forgot that there was a desirable suitor waiting at the stage door.

"You've come back a success, a famous playwright!" she declared, when he had finished. "I always told you your play was wonderful!"

"But I thought it was—"

"It *was* lost, and then one day it turned up in a pile of manuscripts that Mr. Hibbard asked me to clean out of his closet. I read it again, and was more convinced than ever it would go big some day—if the right manager saw it. With it I found the list of managers you had asked that it should be sent to, and I knew then that Hibbard had lied to you. He hadn't tried to place your play. He never would try. I had begun to find out unpleasant things about that agency. So I kept the manuscript—kept it myself. When I taxed Mr. Hibbard with his treatment of you, he became nasty, indignant, and then—then he discharged me. Oh!"

She put up her hand to check Reneker.

"It was the best thing that could have happened for both of us. You remember I told you I had always wanted to act? Well, I went to the Provincetown Players and got a job understudying small parts. They were decent to beginners, and not too uptownish to feel they couldn't afford to

give me training. I worked my head off. I got small parts, then bigger ones, and then I read them your play. I'd read it so many times I knew it by heart. Besides, I knew things about it which you had written and cut out. I saw the interest that was being taken, just then, in realism, in dramas of small town life. The Provincetown Players sent me to the Theater Guild. They accepted your play, and Mr. Blake bought the rights from them. He kept me to play the part, and there you are! That's the whole story—except that your royalties have not been squandered. They're in the bank, waiting for you."

She finished speaking. Reneker stood marveling at what she had done, and remembering her in those other days when he had sat beside her desk, dictating to her, and had shyly watched her profile and been warmed by its nearness. Yes, there might have been a romance there, he had thought afterward.

Now he stepped close to her.

"You were the only one who ever had faith in me—" he began, and then paused at the sight of the color flooding her cheeks.

At that moment the manager deemed it wise to depart, and Miss Snow, turning, dismissed the maid for the night. Then she faced Reneker.

"I've always had faith in you," she faltered; "all the while I knew you when alive, and—"

She broke off with a quaver in her voice.

"And when dead, too?" he added softly.

"Was it you who were going to give me the silver casket and the tomb on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson?"

She nodded, her eyes dim.

"It was in one of your poems. You told where you would like to rest 'when life and love are ended.'"

Tears came into her eyes. Reneker seized her by the shoulders, exultant, and at his words her tears vanished radiantly.

"'When life and love are ended'—ah, but they aren't! They are only beginning, for us!"

A COMPLIMENT

For you the rose
We see disclose
In blushing heat
A tear of dew,
In fear lest you
Should prove more sweet!

La Touche Hancock

Classy Fellows

THE SOCIAL AND MATRIMONIAL AMBITIONS OF MAMIE AND
SUSIE, MODELS AT CHRISTOFFERSON'S

By William Slavens McNutt

ME and Susie Kosofsky wanted to meet some fellows that had some class.

"All we got to do is just meet them, Mamie," she says. "Fellows that's got class has to marry somebody, don't they? Sure! And the ones they marry ain't any better-looking than you and me, is they? No! Well, then, I ask you, if we can meet some classy fellows, why shouldn't they marry us?"

Susie and me was models at Christofferson's. Believe me, if you're good-looking enough to be a model at Christofferson's, you're good-looking enough to marry any fellow, no matter how classy he is. All the women that were customers at Christofferson's was married to classy fellows, or else they had fathers that was classy. They had to be either married to classy fellows or have classy fathers, or they wouldn't have had the money to buy things at Christofferson's.

You should have seen the kinds of looking women some of them were! Honest, if some of them dames that come to Christofferson's to buy their coats and dresses hadn't had the chance to meet the classy fellows they was married to, I don't know what they would have done for their living, because fellows that wasn't classy wouldn't have looked at them twice. I guess classy fellows don't get a chance to meet many girls. Just look at what some of them get married to!

I was living at home then, and I was going around with Steve Riordan. Steve was a nice fellow, but he drove a truck, and he wasn't classy.

Once I had a fellow that was a little bit classy, but not much. He played pool games, and bet on horses, and dressed nice; but when my father seen me with him he

licked him, and told me I shouldn't go around with him no more. I wasn't going to mind my father, and I sneaked out and met this fellow, and told him I would go with him anyway, no matter what my father said.

"You will not," this fellow says. "You needn't pay attention to what your father says, if you want to," he says; "but if you want me not to pay attention to him," he says, "you got to get a new father who has got a left hook that is not so much like the kick of a mule," he says.

So I didn't go out with him any more, but I begun to go with Steve Riordan. I didn't really go out with him much, because after I had went out with him a couple of times, one night it was raining, and Steve didn't have much money, because he'd been pinched for fighting, and had to pay a fine to the judge, and anyhow it was Sunday night; so we stayed in, and Steve played pinochle with my father.

After that we didn't go out much, because every time Steve come to take me out we would stay in instead, and he would play pinochle with my father. Anybody would think he was married to me, the way he paid no attention to me, except to play pinochle with my father.

My father wanted I should get married with Steve, because he liked him. He liked him because he drove a truck and played pinochle. He didn't like any fellows that was classy, not even a little bit; he always got mad when he seen them.

I didn't like Steve so much, because he drove a truck and played pinochle. You can't go riding with a fellow on a coal truck. If you're married to him, and he plays pinochle, and you would like to play it too, he says:

"Go on and get them dishes washed," or

"Why don't you mend them socks?" or something like that.

Then he gets some other fellow to come and play pinochle while you get the dishes washed, or mend the socks, or something like that. I thought to myself, what kind of a way is that to live, for a girl like me, who is good-looking enough to be a model at Christofferson's and could marry a classy fellow if she just got a chance to meet one?

Susie Kosofsky had a fellow, but he wasn't classy, either. He worked on ships. When the ships come in, he would take the stuff out of them and put it on the dock; and then, when he got it out, he would take other stuff off the dock and put it in the ship. He didn't play pinochle with Susie's father, because Susie's father didn't play pinochle; but he would come to her house and set with her, and tell her who he licked, and how fellows was scared of him, and how much money he won shooting craps, instead of taking her to some dances, or a movie, or something like that. When he didn't set in the house with her, he would say:

"Let's go for a walk."

Then they would go for a walk, and that was all. They would just walk. So Susie didn't like him so much, even if he didn't play pinochle with her father, like Steve did with mine. She wanted to meet some classy fellows and see what would happen.

So both of us was feeling like we wanted to meet some classy fellows, and see if maybe things wouldn't turn out for the best, only both of us didn't know how we could meet them. Susie said that if we got a job being actresses in a theater, classy fellows would see us acting on the stage; and then, when we come off work, they would be waiting for us, at the door where we come out, with bunches of flowers, and they would say:

"How do you do?"

She said she read a piece in a paper that that was the way girls that acted in a theater come to meet classy fellows.

"Yes," I says to her, when she says that to me; "that would be fine! If we had been born in a mansion of Fifth Avenue, and our fathers was presidents of banks, or something like that, that would be fine, too; but we wasn't," I says, "and we ain't got any job acting in a theater, either. I can think of lots of things that would be fine for us," I says; "but what's the use of thinking of them when they ain't so?"

"We can get a job acting in the theater," Susie says.

"How can we?" I asked her. "We are just girls like anybody else, and the world is full of that kind of girls," I says. "They can't all get jobs acting in a theater, or they would do it. If somebody who is just a girl like anybody else gets a job acting in a theater, she's got to get a divorce from some fellow who has got money, or maybe shoot some classy fellow that she's in love with. And," I says to Susie, "before you can get a divorce from some man who has got a lot of money, you've got to get married to him," I says. "And if we was married to some fellow like that, what would be the sense in getting a divorce just to get a job acting in a theater? And," I says, "if you're going to shoot some classy fellow that you're in love with, you've got to meet him first, haven't you? You can't just go around and shoot some classy fellow you never met before. And," I says, "if you met some classy fellow and was in love with him, why not wait and see would he marry you? What's the sense shooting him just to get a job acting in a theater? If you shoot him, maybe he would die, and he couldn't marry you anyhow, even if he wanted to. If he didn't die, maybe he would get mad because you shot him, and then he wouldn't marry you, either."

Susie was mad with me then, and said I didn't have any sense. She says that lots of the girls that was acting in theaters don't have to know any more about it than if they was models at Christofferson's. She says they don't have to act at all; that they just put on the clothes that the theater buys for them, and come on the stage, and jump around and open their mouths, so that the people who come into the theater to see them will think they're singing; but if they don't know how to sing, all they got to do is to open their mouths and pretend. Susie says that most of the people who come to the theater to see the show don't care if they are singing or not, anyhow. She says most of them are classy fellows, and they don't come to the theater to listen; they come to look.

"If they wanted to listen to somebody singing, they could stay home and play the phonograph," she says. "Singing is just the same from a phonograph as any place else, ain't it? Sure! But when you're listening to a phonograph, you don't see no pretty girls jumping around on the stage,

and that's what classy fellows come to the theater for. We're good-looking," she says, "and if we got the chance, I bet we could jump around on the stage as good as any of them!"

"Yes, sure," I says. "If we got the chance! That's just the difference," I says, "between girls like us, who is just girls like anybody else, and girls who got the chance to meet some classy fellow and get married to him, and now look at them! They got servants and automobiles and fur coats and little white dogs and everything. How can we get the chance?" I says.

II

SUSIE says she knows a girl who was a model in Christofferson's before I come to work there, by the name of Rosie Lipowitz, who got a job jumping around on a stage in the theater. Now, Susie says, she calls her name Rosina Lytell, and she's met so many classy fellows, that come with bunches of flowers and wait at the door for her when she comes off work, that she don't know which one of them it would be best for her to marry. Susie says Rosie says that's the only reason she ain't married one of them yet. And Susie says she'll see Rosie and ask her how did she get her job, and then we'll get our job the same way.

So Susie went to Rosie and asked her how did she get her job acting on the stage. Rosie told Susie she got her job because she had talent. But then Susie went and saw Rosie's aunt, who keeps a delicatessen store and don't like Rosie, and she told Susie Rosie didn't get her job because she had talent, but because she had a cousin who works with the electric lights on the stage, and he was what got Rosie her job. She said since Rosie got her job she was so stuck up anybody would think that she had royal blood in her veins, or that her father knew the mayor to say how do you do to him, or something like that.

Rosie's aunt says Rosie is so stuck up, since she got her job, that her cousin who got her the job is sorry he did. She says Rosie's cousin tells her that girls acting on the stage is just like anybody else—some is all right, and some is just bums. She says he tells her that the ones what are stuck up because they got a job acting on the stage are the ones who are just bums; and she says he tells her that that is the kind that Rosie is. She says she knew it all the time, anyhow.

And then she says to Susie that she will get Rosie's cousin to get us a job acting on the stage. That would make Rosie mad, her aunt says, and Rosie wouldn't have anything to be stuck up about any more, because if we could get jobs acting on the stage, what was there to be stuck up about?

So Rosie's cousin was going to get us jobs acting on the stage, where we could meet some classy fellows; but before he got them for us, Rosie said something sassy to him, while she was standing by the door of the stage waiting until it was time for her to act, and he slapped her face. The actor who was the hero in the show didn't know that Rosie was his cousin, so he hits Rosie's cousin for slapping her. Then Rosie's cousin smashed him in the snoot, and got fired from his job before he could get us one.

He couldn't get us a job at the theater, for he didn't even have one there himself; but he told us how we should do to get one. He told us we should go by a place he give us the name of, where people get hired to act on the stage, and how we should talk when we got there. He told us we should lie and say to everybody that we had been acting on the stage for a long time. He gave us the names of some shows that we could say we had had jobs with.

We had Saturday afternoon off at Christofferson's, so one Saturday afternoon we went by this place that Rosie's cousin said we should go. It was a room that had benches around the wall, and chairs in it. There was a lot of girls and a couple of fellows sitting on the benches and in the chairs, like Rosie's cousin told us there would be. He told us they would be actors and actresses looking for jobs, and he told us how we should talk so they would think we had had jobs acting before, and weren't new hands. So we talked the way he told us to talk, and right away they got friendly with us.

Pretty soon none of them in the room was talking to anybody else, only to me and Susie. And did they laugh? Oh, did they laugh while they was talking to us? They laughed so much that I thought, by and by, that they wasn't making friends with us, but was making fun with us.

While I was thinking that maybe this was how it was, the man that hires you for jobs acting in the theater come out from the little room, where he don't come out from very often, and he was laughing, too,

I thought to myself maybe people who have acting jobs are very happy, and laugh all the time; and maybe that is why they are laughing, instead of at us.

When the man who hires you for the acting jobs came out of the room, right away he picked out me and Susie to speak to. We told him all the lies that Rosie's cousin had told us to tell, only we got them mixed up a little bit, maybe. The man laughed, and everybody that was in the room laughed.

"If I could just get you to go on the stage and be natural," the man says, "you would be winners!"

I says that was all right, we would be willing to be natural if he would show us how. Then he says for us to wait a minute, and he calls a man on the telephone and says:

"Hurry up over, Gus! This is rich! This is the funniest thing since the Cherry sisters come to Kansas City."

Then he listens on the phone for a minute, and he says:

"All right—make it three o'clock Monday, and I will try and get them to come back then. Get Eddie," he says, "and Bill Willis, and any of the rest of the gang you see. We'll get them to do some stuff. It'll be great!"

And then he says to us will we come back at three o'clock Monday, and he would have the foremen from a lot of the shows there to see how good we are, and maybe give us jobs?

So we said sure, we would come back, and went downstairs.

"How are we going to come back at three o'clock Monday," I says to Susie, "when we got to be at work at Christofferson's?"

"What do we care about work at Christofferson's?" Susie says. "Ain't we just as good as got better jobs already, acting in a theater? Would he have the foremen come over special to see us, and waste all their time, if they wasn't going to give us a job?"

While we was standing on the sidewalk in front of the stairs, talking about it, a woman who had been writing on a typewriting machine, up in the office, come down, and she was looking for us.

"Don't be simple," she says to us. "Haven't either one of you got sense even to know when people are making fools of you? It's a shame," she says, "for full-

grown men to pick on foolish girls like you. They're just making fun of you," she says. "Don't you come back here Monday afternoon, because they want to get you here and make fun of you some more. It's a shame," she says.

"Won't they give us no jobs?" Susie asked her.

"You foolish child!" the woman says to her. "Don't you know there are hundreds of girls walking Broadway looking for every job that's open? Girls that have had plenty of experience? And that the managers know them and all, like that?" she says. "Cut it out!" she says. "Go on and do whatever you are doing, and don't come back here and be made fools of."

So me and Susie decided we wouldn't act on the stage, even for the chance of meeting classy fellows.

"The way I look at it," Susie says to me, "a girl who is acting on the stage, and jumping around with not much clothes on, may be a nice girl and all that, but you never can tell," she says. "And," she says, "I wouldn't want to be doing anything which would make people that seen me think maybe I was a nice little girl, but probably I wasn't. Would you?" she says to me.

"No, I would not," I says.

"Then we had better not get jobs acting on the stage," Susie says.

So I thought we had better not, too, and that was the end of that.

III

So we kept on working at Christofferson's, and I thought maybe I would marry Steve Riordan, and make him a good wife and be happy. I says to Susie, I says to her:

"Girls that gets a chance to meet classy fellows and marries them is hardly ever happy," I says. "Look at what you see in the movies," I says to her. "It's always girls that marry some fellow with a good heart, like Steve Riordan, that is happy," I says. "Of course," I says to her, "I would rather meet some classy fellow and marry him, and have servants and a fur coat and automobiles and a little white dog, than to be happy," I says; "but," I says to her, "if I can't have them things, I might as well marry Steve, and make him a good wife and be happy," I says.

Susie said she guessed that would be better than nothing, and maybe she would

marry her fellow that worked on the docks, and be happy too.

"Ain't it funny," she says to me, "how tough it is to do anything that makes you happy?" she says.

I told her yes, it was funny; but the way I look at it, you can't have everything.

"If you can't get a lot of money, why, then you can marry some fellow, like Steve, and be happy," I says; "and if you *can* get a lot of money, why what do you care whether you're happy or not?"

So we kept on working at Christofferson's.

One day Mrs. Frazee come in, and there was nobody buying things, and she got to talking to me and Susie. Is she a nice woman? Oh, is she nice? She's a buyer for Christofferson's and goes back and forth to Europe, first-class all the time, like her husband was a millionaire. He ain't a millionaire, truly, because he's dead. The way she travels back and forth on the boats, you would think he was one, if he was alive. You would think she would be stuck up, the way she travels back and forth all the time, and lives like a millionaire's wife, and they pay her big wages and everything; but when she ain't busy, you would think she was no better than a model at Christofferson's, the way she talks with us girls.

So this day she was talking with us, and she told us that she had to go to Europe again right away, and she hadn't thought she would have to go for maybe a couple of months.

"Gee!" me and Susie says. "Don't we wish we had to go!"

"I bet you get a chance to meet with lots of classy fellows, riding first-class on them big boats!" I says.

And then we got to talking about meeting classy fellows, and me and Susie told her how we tried, and hadn't met any. You should have seen her laugh! She did not laugh mean, though. If somebody else had laughed that way, maybe me and Susie would have been mad; but when Mrs. Frazee laughed, me and Susie laughed too, because it wasn't mean.

After she got done laughing, Mrs. Frazee says:

"Would you like to go by a big swell ball at the Strathmore Hotel?" she says. "It's a ball where you got to wear fancy clothes, too. The Talent Club is giving it," she says. "They're a lot of artists and things like that, and lots of swell peo-

ple come to it. I got a ticket which I can't use, because I got to go to Europe right away. I'll give it to you," she says, "and you can decide between you," she says, "which one of you will use it."

So she give it to us, and went away. Me and Susie looked at each other and wondered if maybe we was going to fight about it, which one of us should use it.

"Listen," Susie says to me. "You could marry Steve Riordan, and be happy, if you wanted to," she says. "He's not so dumb as the fellow what I got," she says. "Let me have the ticket, and if I meet some classy fellow and get married with him, I won't be stuck up with you at all. If it comes out that way, I'll leave you come to my house, and boss my servants, and ride in my automobile, and pet my dog, and everything. It will be almost like you was me, if I do that way. If it come out like that, you could marry Steve and be happy, and still have a good time besides. You would be having it better than me, 'cause I wouldn't be happy; I would only be having a good time."

"Listen," I says to her. "You could talk all night and all the next day telling me reasons why you should take the ticket and I should stay home, and I wouldn't hear one of them. I tell you what," I says. "We'll toss a coin for it—heads I go, tails you go."

So we threw a quarter up in the air, and it fell down with the heads up, and Susie cried.

"Never mind," I says to her. "I'll tell you all about what it is like, when I come back; and if I have any luck, and meet any classy fellow, and get married with him, I'll do by you as you said you would do by me."

Susie kept on crying.

"I don't have any luck," she says. "I think I'll marry my fellow that works on the docks, and have some children, and maybe one of them will be bright and get rich and give me things, like a classy fellow would if I had any luck and could meet one. Only," she says, "my fellow is so dumb it's just my luck that all the children would be like him. None of them would ever make any money, and I would have to die in the poorhouse. That is the kind of luck I have," she says.

So I got me a fancy dress from a second-hand shop on Sixth Avenue. It was supposed to be the kind of a dress you wear

if you're a Spanish dancer. I told my father I was going over to see Susie. I did go over to see Susie for a minute, and put on my fancy dress there. Then I put my cloak on around the dress, and I went up to the ball at the Strathmore Hotel.

Susie's fellow that worked on the docks come to see her while I was there. He had been drinking.

"What do you say we take a walk?" he says to her.

Susie cried a little bit.

"That's just my luck," she says. "I don't get a chance to go to the ball and meet some classy fellow; and the fellow I got, even when he's stewed to the eyebrows, he wouldn't take me out and have some fun. All he would do is want to go for a walk. I bet," she says, "even if he got drunk on carbolic acid, he wouldn't get crazy enough to spend a nickel on a street car, instead of just walking!"

So Susie and her fellow, who had been drinking, went for a walk, and I went to the ball at the Strathmore.

IV

WAS I nervous? Oh, was I nervous? I thought to myself I wouldn't talk much, when I got in, because I don't know if I can pretend to be like classy people when I talk. I look all right, but I don't know whether I can talk all right.

I didn't know what place the ball was at in the hotel, and I was scared to ask anybody. If I did, maybe they would know, from the way I talked, that somebody gimme a ticket, and they would chase me out. So I walked around in the hotel, wondering what should I do, and oh, was I scared?

I thought maybe a detective had seen me walking around, and would ask me what was I doing there. Then maybe I would have to talk, and he would know I was not the kind of people that come to the ball, and he would chase me out.

Nobody come and asked me what I was doing there, because all the time I was walking around I kept looking like a rich girl. I know how to look like a rich girl, because lots of them come in Christofferson's, and I would watch how they looked, and then I would go home and practice looking that way in front of a mirror. It's easy. All you got to do is to throw your head back and look like you was kind of tired, and a little mad about something.

After a while I see a sign on an elevator

that says to take it to the eleventh floor, and that's the ballroom. So I took it, and there was a lot of fellows and girls took it, too. Was they classy? Oh, was they classy? They was so classy I thought for a minute they would look at me, and right away they would know how things was, and call for a detective, and have him chase me out.

But they didn't look at me, and pretty soon I begun to feel better. I smelled the kinds of perfume they had on, and it didn't smell as good as the kind I had on. You would think that people that was rich, and money don't mean nothing in their lives, would buy themselves perfume that was real good; but the perfume they had on wasn't much good. It was weak. When we was all in the elevator together, and you smelled mine, you could hardly smell theirs at all. So I felt better then, because, even if they was rich, I knew I had something that was better than theirs was.

When we got to the eleventh floor, the women went one way and the men went another. I went along with the women, pretending like I had been there before, and was going some place that I knew about, instead of just going along with the women. We come to a place where there was a woman took our cloaks off us. Then I followed the women some more, and come to another place where they took our tickets; and then we went in to where they was dancing.

Was that a place? Oh, was that a place? Big like a park! And was there people there? Oh, was there? You could stand in Times Square at night, when the theaters let out, and there wouldn't be more people there.

And the women! Honest, the things some of them was wearing, you would think they got up out of their beds and was walking in their sleep. Some of them was so bare you'd think they was dancers on a stage. I never seen anybody so bare, except dancers on stages.

Honest, if people who wasn't classy should have a ball, and should come to it as near all bare as some of them women was, they would be pinched! I had been scared my skirt was too short, but when I seen some of them women, the way they was pretty near all bare, I felt like I was dressed ready to go to the north pole.

The men, and the women, too, had on funny things of all kinds, like you see in

some of the shows at Coney Island. Some of them was dressed just like the greenies, when they first come over from the old country, like you see them down at Ellis Island. And was they having a good time? Oh, was they having a good time?

I thought, because they was classy people, they would be acting kind of polite. They wasn't acting polite at all. They didn't act as polite as we do at the dances down in our neighborhood. They was acting more like kids from public school, playing in the street.

I had been scared maybe I wouldn't be able to act polite enough, and they would know I wasn't classy and chase me out. Honest, if I couldn't act politer than they done, I would be ashamed of myself. The way they acted, you would think they had never learned any manners at all. They were just having a good time, and laughing and playing, like they were at home, or at Coney Island, or something like that, instead of to a ball.

I found a place where I could set down, and I set down. I set there and watched them, and wondered what would I do. Would I meet some fellow, so I wouldn't have to just set there and watch until it was time to go home?

V

WHILE I was setting there watching, and wondering what should I do, a fellow come and sat down close beside me. He was a fellow dressed in a uniform like the clowns wear in the circus. He was a kind of a big fellow, and young, and nice-looking.

I pretended like I didn't see him. I sat there, and he sat there, and I kept on pretending like I didn't see him. I didn't know what I should do. I didn't know should I keep on pretending I didn't see him, or should I look at him and smile, or what. I was beginning to think maybe I had better quit pretending I didn't see him, and look at him and smile or something, when he spoke to me.

"I beg your pardon," he says. "May I have this dance?"

"Sure!" I started to say.

But then I thought to myself:

"I can look like a rich girl better than I can talk like one; so maybe I had better not talk for a while."

So I didn't talk to him, but I smiled a little bit and nodded my head, and we got up and we danced. After we danced, we sat

down again, and he said wasn't it hot? I thought a minute what I should say, and then I says:

"Well," I says, "I been to Florida all winter," I says; "and it is hot down there all winter, so it doesn't seem hot to me here now."

"Oh!" he says. "Was you at Palm Beach?"

"Yes," I says, because I couldn't think of any other place to say I had been to.

"I was there last year," he says.

"Was you?" I says.

Was I scared? Oh, was I scared? I was afraid he would ask me some questions, and find out I was lying, and call a detective and get me chased out. That would be just my luck, to get chased out, when I just met a classy fellow. So I says:

"It's nice there, ain't it? Let's dance!"

So we danced, and all the while we was dancing I kept thinking to myself what should I do so I wouldn't have to talk about Palm Beach. When we sat down again, I looked kind of tired and a little bit mad, the way rich girls mostly look, and I says to him:

"When I'm at a ball I'm funny," I says.

"I don't like to talk much. I just like to dance; and when I'm not dancing, I like to just sit and watch people and think."

He says he was the same way; so we danced some more, and when we wasn't dancing we set and watched people, and I pretended like I was thinking, and everything was going fine.

While I was pretending like I was thinking, somebody hollered:

"Fire!"

A fellow got up on a chair, and yelled out and says:

"Don't run!" he says. "There's no danger. Walk out quietly!"

Everybody begun to run, and everybody yelled to everybody else to shut up and not get excited, and some women screamed. Then there was a little smoke come into the ballroom from the hall. Everybody run toward the door that went out into the hall, and they got all jammed up so you would think they was in the subway. Some women fainted, and some fellows picked them up in their arms and carried them out of the place.

"There is a fire!" says the fellow that was with me. "We had better go. I think we can get out all right, but we had better go at once."

It was some of the women fainting that give me the idea.

"I'll faint," I thought to myself. "Then this fellow will pick me up in his arms and carry me out, and we'll get acquainted good that way, and nobody knows what will happen."

So I give a little scream and fainted, and he picked me up in his arms and carried me out in the hall.

When we got there, some firemen was telling the people that it was all over, and that it was only just a little fire in one room, and didn't amount to much. So then I come to again, and the fellow set me down on my feet.

"You have saved my life!" I says.

"Oh, it's nothing," he says. "How do you feel now?"

"I'm all right," I says.

"Get your things and I'll take you home," he says.

I went and got my cloak, and then I says to myself:

"What will I do now?"

If he took me to where Susie lived, down on Bleeker Street, where my clothes was, he would know right away I wasn't the kind of girl he thought I was, and maybe he would get mad and not ask me would I see him again. Then I thought to myself that I would tell him I am a settlement worker, because lots of rich girls is settlement workers, and they live down in places like where Susie lives, just for fun, or something like that. So I told him I'm a settlement worker, and I live down on Bleeker Street.

He got a taxicab, and we rode down to where Susie lives on Bleeker Street. On the way down he asked me could he see me again, and I said yes, and everything was going fine.

We got out of the taxicab near by where Susie lived, and there was Steve Riordan walking up and down and looking mad. He grabbed me by the shoulder.

"Where have you been?" he says.

Then he looks at the fellow that was with me.

"Hello, Jim!" he says. "What do you think you're doing, getting out of a taxicab with my girl?"

The fellow that had been with me acted kind of scared.

"I didn't know she was your girl, Steve," he says. "I picked her up at the Talent Club ball, at the Strathmore Hotel."

"You did, did you?" Steve says. "Well, I'll teach you to pick up my girl!" he says.

Then he hit this fellow I had been with, and they fought, and Steve licked him something terrible. So I cried, and Steve went with me to Susie's while I got my clothes.

Susie was crying, too, because her fellow that had been drinking had went walking with her, and had got in a fight and got pinched. So I got my clothes on, and Steve walked home with me. He said if I would marry him next week he wouldn't tell my father, and I wouldn't get a slap alongside of the jaw.

So I married him next week, and he told me about the fellow that I had been with at the ball, who I thought was a classy fellow. He told me the fellow was just a fellow named Jim Wilkins, and he was a chauffeur for a rich man. Lots of times he would buy tickets to balls and places like that, where classy people go, and where some other kinds of people can go too, and he would go there and try to butt in and get acquainted with some classy girl. He told Steve that maybe some day he would marry one, and not have to be a chauffeur any more.

Steve said that was how this Wilkins fellow come to be at Palm Beach, because he was there driving a car for the rich man he worked for. Steve said how he come to be working for the rich fellow was that he was driving a coal truck for the same company that Steve worked for, only he was no good, and got fired. Steve said he wasn't a classy fellow at all, and he wouldn't be any good if he was. Steve says classy fellows is just bums.

So I got married with Steve, and quit working at Christofferson's, and what do you think? That night I was to the ball, when Susie went walking with her fellow that had been drinking, and he got pinched for fighting, a fellow seen Susie crying on the street after her fellow was pinched, and he took her home.

And what do you think? He was a young man that kept a delicatessen store, and he come back to see Susie, and he and Susie got married.

And what do you think? He keeps a delicatessen store right around the corner from where me and Steve got a flat, and now I buy all my stuff there, and Susie waits on me. Ain't it funny how things come out sometimes?

The Girl from Hollywood

A MODERN DRAMA OF CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "Tarzan of the Apes," "A Princess of Mars," etc.

XXXIII

CUSTER'S gait showed no indication of the amount that he had drunk. He was a Pennington of Virginia, and he could carry his liquor like a gentleman. Even though he was aflame with the heat of vengeance, his movements were slow and deliberate. At the door he paused, and, turning, retraced his steps to the table where stood the bottle and the glass.

The bottle was empty. He went to the closet and got another. Again he drank, and as he stood there by the table he commenced to plan again.

There must be some reason for the thing he contemplated. There must be some reason so logical that the discovery of his act could in no way reflect upon Shannon Burke, or draw her name into the publicity which must ensue. It required time to think out a feasible plan, and time gave opportunity for additional drinks.

The colonel and Mrs. Pennington were away somewhere down in the valley. Eva and Shannon were the first to return. In passing along the arcade by Custer's open window, Eva saw him lying on his bed. She called to him, but he did not answer. Shannon was at her side.

"What in the world do you suppose is the matter with Custer?" asked Eva.

They saw that he was fully dressed. His hat had fallen forward over his eyes. The two girls entered the room, when they could not arouse him by calling him from the outside. The two bottles and the glass upon the table told their own story. What they could not tell Shannon guessed—he had overheard the conversation between Wilson Crumb and herself.

Eva removed the bottles and the glass to the closet.

"Poor Cus!" she said. "I never saw him like this before. I wonder what could have happened! What had we better do?"

"Pull down the shades by his bed," said Shannon, and this she did herself without waiting for Eva. "No one can see him from the patio now. It will be just as well to leave him alone, I think, Eva. He will probably be all right when he wakes up."

They went out of the room, closing the door after them, and a little later Shannon mounted the Senator and rode away toward home.

Her thoughts were bitter. Wherever Crumb went he brought misery. Whatever he touched he defiled. She wished that he was dead. God, how she wished it! She could have killed him with her own hands for the grief that he had brought to Custer Pennington.

She did not care so much about herself. She was used to suffering because of Wilson Crumb; but that he should bring his foulness into the purity of Ganado was unthinkable. Her brief happiness was over. Now indeed was there nothing more in life for her. She was not easily moved to tears, but that night she was still sobbing when she fell asleep.

When the colonel and Mrs. Pennington arrived at the ranch house, just before dinner, Eva told them that Custer was not feeling well, and that he had lain down to sleep and had asked not to be disturbed. They did not go to his room at all, and at about half past eight they retired for the night.

Eva was very much excited. She had never before experienced the thrill of such

an adventure as she was about to embark upon. As the time approached, she became more and more perturbed. The realization grew upon her that what she was doing might seem highly objectionable to her family; but as her innocent heart held no suggestion of evil, she considered that her only wrong was the infraction of those unwritten laws of well regulated homes which forbid their daughters going out alone at night. She would tell about it in the morning, and wheedle her father into forgiveness.

Quickly she changed into riding clothes. Leaving her room, she noiselessly passed through the living room and the east wing to the kitchen, and from there to the basement, from which a tunnel led beneath the driveway and opened on the hillside above the upper pool of the water gardens. To get her horse and saddle him required but a few moments, for the moon was full and the night almost like day.

Her heart was beating with excitement as she rode up the cañon toward the big sycamore that stood at the junction of Sycamore Cañon and El Camino Largo, where Crumb had told her the night scenes would be taken. She walked her horse past the bunk house, lest some of the men might hear her; but when she was through the east gate, beyond the old goat corral, she broke into a canter.

As she passed the mouth of Jackknife she glanced up the cañon toward the site of the K. K. S. camp, but she could not see any lights, as the camp was fairly well hidden from the main cañon by trees. As she approached El Camino Largo, she saw that all was darkness. There was no sign of the artificial lights she imagined they would use for shooting night scenes, nor was there anything to indicate the presence of the actors.

She continued on, however, until presently she saw the outlines of a car beneath the big sycamore. A man stepped out and hailed her.

"Is that you, Miss Pennington?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "Aren't you going to take the pictures to-night?"

She rode up quite close to him. It was Crumb.

"I am just waiting for the others. Won't you dismount?"

As she swung from the saddle, he led her horse to his car and tied him to the spare tire in the rear; then he returned to

the girl. As they talked, he adroitly turned the subject of their conversation toward the possibilities for fame and fortune which lay in pictures for a beautiful and talented girl.

Long practice had made Wilson Crumb an adept in his evil arts. Ordinarily he worked very slowly, considering that weeks, or even months, were not ill spent if they led toward the consummation of his desires; but in this instance he realized that he must work quickly. He must take the girl by storm or not at all.

So unsophisticated was Eva, and so innocent, that she did not realize from his conversation what would have been palpable to one more worldly wise; and because she did not repulse him, Crumb thought that she was not averse to his advances. It was not until he seized her and tried to kiss her that she awoke to a realization of her danger, and of the position in which her silly credulity had placed her.

She carried a quirt in her hand, and she was a Pennington. What matter that she was but a slender girl? The honor and the courage of a Pennington were hers.

"How dare you?" she cried, attempting to jerk away.

When he would have persisted, she raised the heavy quirt and struck him across the face.

"My father shall hear of this, and so shall the man I am to marry—Mr. Evans."

"Go slow!" he growled angrily. "Be careful what you tell! Remember that you came up here alone at night to meet a man you have known only a day. How will you square that with your assertions of virtue, eh? And as for Evans—yes, one of your men told me to-day that you and he were going to be married—as for him, the less you drag him into this the better it 'll be for Evans, and you, too!"

She was walking toward her horse. She wheeled suddenly toward him.

"Had I been armed, I would have killed you," she said. "Any Pennington would kill you for what you attempted. My father or my brother will kill you if you are here to-morrow, for I shall tell them what you have done. You had better leave to-night. I am advising you for their sakes—not for yours."

He followed her then, and, when she mounted, he seized her reins.

"Not so damned fast, young lady! I've got something to say about this. You'll

keep your mouth shut, or I'll send Evans to the pen, where he belongs!"

"Get out of my way!" she commanded, and put her spurs to her mount.

The horse leaped forward, but Crumb clung to the reins, checking him. Then she struck Crumb again; but he managed to seize the quirt and hold it.

"Now listen to me," he said. "If you tell what happened here to-night, I'll tell what I know about Evans, and he'll go to the pen as sure as you're a silly little fool!"

"You know nothing about Mr. Evans. You don't even know him."

"Listen—I'll tell you what I know. I know that Evans let your brother, who was innocent, go to the pen for the thing that Evans was guilty of."

The girl shrank back.

"You lie!" she cried.

"No, I don't lie, either. I'm telling you the truth, and I can bring plenty of witnesses to prove what I say. It was young Evans who handled all that stolen booze and sold it to some guy from L. A. It was young Evans who got the money. He was getting rich on it till your brother butted in and crabbed his game, and then it was young Evans who kept still and let an innocent man do time for him. That's the kind of fellow you're going to marry. If you want the whole world to know about it, you just tell your father or your brother anything about me!"

He saw the girl sink down in her saddle, her head and shoulders drooping like some lovely flower in the path of fire, and he knew that he had won. Then he let her go.

It was half past nine o'clock when Colonel Pennington was aroused by some one knocking on the north door of his bedroom—the door that opened upon the north porch.

"Who is it?" he asked.

It was the stableman.

"Miss Eva's horse is out, sir," the man said. "I heard a horse pass the bunk house about half an hour ago. I dressed and come up here to the stables, to see if it was one of ours—somethin' seemed to tell me it was—an' I found her horse out. I thought I'd better tell you about it, sir. You can't tell, sir, with all them pictur' people up the cañon, what might be goin' on. We'll be lucky if we have any horses or tack left if they're here long!"

"Miss Eva's in bed," said the colonel;

"but we'll have to look into this at once. Custer's sick to-night, so he can't go along with us; but if you will saddle up my horse, and one for yourself, I'll dress and be right down. It can't be the picture people—they're not horse thieves."

While the stableman returned to saddle the horses, the colonel dressed. So sure was he that Eva was in bed that he did not even stop to look into her room. As he left the house, he was buckling on a gun—a thing that he seldom carried, for even in the peaceful days that have settled upon southern California a horse thief is still a horse thief.

As he was descending the steps to the stable, he saw some one coming up. In the moonlight there was no difficulty in recognizing the figure of his daughter.

"Eva!" he exclaimed. "Where have you been? What are you doing out at this time of night, alone?"

She did not answer, but threw herself into his arms, sobbing.

"What is it? What has happened, child? Tell me!"

Her sobs choked her, and she could not speak. Putting his arm about her, her father led her up the steps and to her room. There he sat down and held her, and tried to comfort her, while he endeavored to extract a coherent statement from her.

Little by little, word by word, she managed at last to tell him.

"You mustn't cry, dear," he said. "You did a foolish thing to go up there alone, but you did nothing wrong. As for what that fellow told you about Guy, I don't believe it."

"But it's the truth," she sobbed. "I know it is the truth now. Little things that I didn't think of before come back to me, and in the light of what that terrible man told me I know that it's true. We always knew that Custer was innocent. Think what a change came over Guy from the moment that Custer was arrested. He has been a different man since. And the money—the money that we were to be married on! I never stopped to try to reason it out. He had thousands of dollars. He told me not to tell anybody how much he had; and that was where it came from. It couldn't have come from anything else. Oh, popsy, it is awful, and I loved him so! To think that he, that Guy Evans, of all men, would have let my brother go to jail for something he did!"

Again her sobs stifled her.

"Crying will do no good," the colonel said. "Go to bed now, and to-morrow we will talk it over. Good night, little girl. Remember, we'll all stick to Guy, no matter what he has done."

He kissed her then and left her, but he did not return to his room. Instead, he went down to the stables and saddled his horse, for the stableman, when Eva came in with the missing animal, had put it in its box and returned to the bunk house.

The colonel rode immediately to the sleeping camp in Jackknife Cañon. His calls went unanswered for a time, but presently a sleepy man stuck his head through the flap of a tent.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I am looking for Mr. Crumb. Where is he?"

"I don't know. He went away in his car early in the evening, and hasn't come back. What's the matter, anyway? You're the second fellow that's been looking for him. Oh, you're Colonel Pennington, aren't you? I didn't recognize you. Why, some one was here a little while ago looking for him—a young fellow on horseback. I think it must have been your son. Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said the colonel. "In case I don't see Mr. Crumb, you can tell him, or whoever is in charge, that you're to break camp in the morning and be off my property by ten o'clock!"

He wheeled his horse and rode down Jackknife Cañon toward Sycamore.

"Well, what the hell!" ejaculated the sleepy man to himself, and withdrew again into his tent.

XXXIV

SHANNON BURKE, after a restless night, rose early in the morning to ride. She always found that the quiet and peace of the hills acted as a tonic on jangling nerves, and dispelled, at least for the moment, any cloud of unhappiness that might be hovering over her.

The first person to see her that morning was the flunky from the K. K. S. camp who was rustling wood for the cook's morning fire. So interested was he in her rather remarkable occupation that he stood watching her from behind a bush until she was out of sight. As long as he saw her, she rode slowly, dragging at her side a leafy bough, which she moved to and fro, as if

sweeping the ground. She constantly looked back, as if to note the effect of her work; and once or twice he saw her go over short stretches of the road a second time, brushing vigorously.

It was quite light by that time, as it was almost five o'clock, and the sun was just rising as she dismounted at the Ganado stables and hurried up the steps toward the house. The iron gate at the patio entrance had not yet been raised, so she went around to the north side of the house and knocked on the colonel's bedroom door.

He came from his dressing room to answer her knock, for he was fully dressed and evidently on the point of leaving for his morning ride. The expression of her face denoted that something was wrong, even before she spoke.

"Colonel," she cried, "Wilson Crumb has been killed. I rode early this morning, and as I came into Sycamore over El Camino Largo I saw his body lying under the big tree there."

They were both thinking the same thought, which neither dared voice—where was Custer?

"Did you notify the camp?" he asked.

"No—I came directly here."

"You are sure that it is Crumb, and that he is dead?" he asked.

"I am sure that it is Crumb. He was lying on his back, and though I didn't dismount I am quite positive that he was dead."

Mrs. Pennington had joined them, herself dressed for riding.

"How terrible!" she exclaimed.

"Terrible nothing," exclaimed the colonel. "I'm damned glad he's dead!"

Shannon looked at him in astonishment, but Mrs. Pennington understood, for the colonel had told her all that Eva had told him.

"He was a bad man," said Shannon. "The world will be better off without him."

"You knew him?" asked the colonel.

"I knew him in Hollywood," she replied.

She knew now that they must all know sooner or later, for she could not see how she could be kept out of the investigation and the trial that must follow. In her heart she feared that Custer had killed Crumb. The fact that he had drank so heavily that afternoon indicated not only that he had overheard, but that what he had heard had affected him profoundly—profoundly enough to have suggested the killing of the

man whom he believed to have wronged the woman he loved.

"The first thing to do, I suppose," said the colonel, "is to notify the sheriff."

He left the room and went to the telephone. While he was away Mrs. Pennington and Shannon discussed the tragedy, and the older woman confided to the other the experience that Eva had had with Crumb the previous night.

"The beast!" muttered Shannon. "Death was too good for him!"

Presently the colonel returned to them.

"I think I'll go and see if the children are going to ride with us," he said. "There is no reason why we shouldn't ride as usual."

He went to Eva's door and looked in. Apparently she was still fast asleep. Her hair was down, and her curls lay in soft confusion upon her pillow. Very gently he closed the door again, glad that she could sleep.

When he entered his son's room, he found Custer lying fully clothed upon his bed, his belt about his waist and his gun at his hip. His suspicions were crystallized into belief.

But why had Custer killed Crumb? He couldn't have known of the man's affront to Eva, for she had seen no member of the family but her father, and in him alone had she confided.

He crossed to the bed and shook Custer by the shoulder. The younger man opened his eyes and sat up on the edge of his bed. He looked first at his father and then at himself—at his boots and spurs, and breeches, and the gun about his waist,

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Five o'clock."

"I must have fallen asleep. I wish it was dinner time! I'm hungry."

"Dinner time! It's only a matter of a couple of hours to breakfast. It's five o'clock in the morning."

Custer rose to his feet in surprise.

"I must have loaded on more than I knew," he said with a wry smile.

"What do you mean?" asked his father.

"I had a blue streak yesterday afternoon, and I took a few drinks; and here I have slept all the way through to the next morning!"

"You haven't been out of the room since yesterday afternoon?" asked the colonel.

"No, of course not. I thought it was still yesterday afternoon until you told me that it is the next morning."

The colonel ran his fingers through his hair.

"I am glad," he said.

Custer didn't know why his father was glad.

"Riding?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'll be with you in a jiffy. I want to wash up a bit."

He met them at the stables a few minutes later. The effect of the liquor had entirely disappeared. He seemed his normal self again, and not at all like a man who had the blood of a new murder on his soul. He was glad to see Shannon, and squeezed her hand as he passed her horse to get his own.

In the few moments since his father had awakened him, he had reviewed the happenings of the previous day, and his loyalty to the girl he loved had determined him that he had nothing to grieve about. Whatever had been between her and Crumb she would explain. Only the fact that Eva had interrupted her had kept him from knowing the whole truth the previous day.

They were mounted, and had started out, when the colonel reined to Custer's side.

"Shannon just made a gruesome find up in Sycamore," he said, and paused.

If he had intended to surprise Custer into any indication of guilty knowledge, he failed.

"Gruesome find!" repeated the younger man. "What was it?"

"Wilson Crumb has been murdered. Shannon found his body."

"The devil!" ejaculated Custer. "Who do you suppose could have done it?"

Then, quite suddenly, his heart came to his mouth, as he realized that there was only one present there who had cause to kill Wilson Crumb. He did not dare to look at Shannon for a long time.

They had gone only a hundred yards when Custer pulled up the Apache and dismounted.

"I thought so," he said, looking at the horse's off forefoot. "He's pulled that shoe again. He must have done it in the corral, for it was on when I put him in last night. You folks go ahead. I'll go back and saddle Baldy."

The stableman was still there, and helped him.

"That was a new shoe," Custer said. "Look about the corral and the box, and see if you can find it. You can tack it back on."

Then he swung to Baldy's back and cantered off after the others.

A deputy sheriff came from the village of Ganado before they returned from their ride, and went up the cañon to take charge of Crumb's body and investigate the scene of the crime.

Eva was still in bed when they were called to breakfast. They insisted upon Shannon's remaining, and the four were passing along the arcade past Eva's room.

"I think I'll go in and waken her," said Mrs. Pennington. "She doesn't like to sleep so late."

The others passed into the living room, and were walking toward the dining room when they were startled by a scream.

"Custer! Custer!" Mrs. Pennington called to her husband.

All three turned and hastened back to Eva's room, where they found Mrs. Pennington half lying across the bed, her body convulsed with sobs. The colonel was the first to reach her, followed by Custer and Shannon. The bedclothes lay half thrown back, where Mrs. Pennington had turned them. The white sheet was stained with blood, and in Eva's hand was clutched a revolver that Custer had given her the previous Christmas.

"My little girl, my little girl!" cried the weeping mother. "Why did you do it?"

The colonel knelt and put his arms about his wife. He could not speak. Custer Pennington stood like a man turned to stone. The shock seemed to have bereft him of the power to understand what had happened. Finally he turned dumbly toward Shannon. The tears were running down her cheeks. Gently she touched his sleeve.

"My poor boy!" she said.

The words broke the spell that had held him. He walked to the opposite side of the bed and bent close to the still, white face of the sister he had worshiped.

"Dear little sister, how could you, when we love you so?" he said.

Gently the colonel drew his wife away, and, kneeling, placed his ear close above Eva's heart. There were no outward indications of life, but presently he lifted his head, an expression of hope relieving that of grim despair which had settled upon his countenance at the first realization of the tragedy.

"She is not dead," he said. "Get Baldwin! Get him at once!" He was address-

ing Custer. "Then telephone Carruthers, in Los Angeles, to get down here as soon as God will let him."

Custer hurried from the room to carry out his father's instructions.

It was later, while they were waiting for the arrival of the doctor, that the colonel told Custer of Eva's experience with Crumb the previous night.

"She wanted to kill herself because of what he told her about Guy," he said. "There was no other reason."

Then the doctor came, and they all stood in tense expectancy and mingled dread and hope while he made his examination. Carefully and deliberately the old doctor worked, outwardly as calm and unaffected as if he were treating a minor injury to a stranger; yet his heart was as heavy as theirs, for he had brought Eva into the world, and had known and loved her all her brief life.

At last he straightened up, to find their questioning eyes upon him.

"She still lives," he said, but there was no hope in his voice.

"I have sent for Carruthers," said the colonel. "He is on his way now. He told Custer that he'll be here in less than three hours."

"I arranged to have a couple of nurses sent out, too," said Custer.

Dr. Baldwin made no reply.

"There is no hope?" asked the colonel.

"There is always hope while there is life," replied the doctor; "but you must not raise yours too high."

They understood him, and realized that there was very little hope.

"Can you keep her alive until Carruthers arrives?" asked the colonel.

"I need not tell you that I shall do my best," was the reply.

Guy had come, with his mother. He seemed absolutely stunned by the catastrophe that had overwhelmed him. There was a wildness in his demeanor that frightened them all. It was necessary to watch him carefully, for fear that he might attempt to destroy himself when he realized at last that Eva was likely to die.

He insisted that they should tell him all the circumstances that had led up to the pitiful tragedy. For a time they sought to conceal a part of the truth from him; but at last, so great was his insistence, they were compelled to reveal all that they knew.

Of a nervous and excitable temperament,

and endowed by nature with a character of extreme sensitiveness and comparatively little strength, the shock of the knowledge that it was his own acts that had led Eva to self-destruction proved too much for Guy's overwrought nerves and brain. So violent did he become that Colonel Pennington and Custer together could scarce restrain him, and it became necessary to send for two of the ranch employees.

When the deputy sheriff came to question them about the murder of Crumb, it was evident that Guy's mind was so greatly affected that he did not understand what was taking place around him. He had sunk into a morose silence broken at intervals by fits of raving. Later in the day, at Dr. Baldwin's suggestion, he was removed to a sanatorium outside of Los Angeles.

Guy's mental collapse, and the necessity for constantly restraining him, had resulted in taking Custer's mind from his own grief, at least for the moment; but when he was not thus occupied he sat staring straight ahead of him in dumb despair.

It was eleven o'clock when the best surgeon that Los Angeles could furnish arrived, bringing a nurse with him, and Eva was still breathing when he came. Dr. Baldwin was there, and together the three worked for an hour while the Penningtons and Shannon waited almost hopelessly in the living room, Mrs. Evans having accompanied Guy to Los Angeles.

Finally, after what seemed years, the door of the living room opened, and Dr. Carruthers entered. They scanned his face as he entered, but saw nothing there to lighten the burden of their apprehension. The colonel and Custer rose.

"Well?" asked the former, his voice scarcely audible.

"The operation was successful. I found the bullet and removed it."

"She will live, then!" cried Mrs. Pennington, coming quickly toward him.

He took her hands very gently in his.

"My dear madam," he said, "it would be cruel of me to hold out useless hope. She hasn't more than one chance in a hundred. It is a miracle that she was alive when you found her. Only a splendid constitution, resulting from the life that she has led, could possibly account for it."

The mother turned away with a low moan.

"There is nothing more that you can do?" asked the colonel.

"I have done all that I can," replied Carruthers.

"She will not last long?"

"It may be a matter of hours, or only minutes," he replied. "She is in excellent hands, however. No one could do more for her than Dr. Baldwin."

The two nurses whom Custer had arranged for had arrived, and when Dr. Carruthers departed he took his own nurse with him.

It was afternoon when deputies from the sheriff's and coroner's offices arrived from Los Angeles, together with detectives from the district attorney's office. Crumb's body still lay where it had fallen, guarded by a constable from the village of Ganado. It was surrounded by members of his company, villagers, and near-by ranchers, for word of the murder had spread rapidly in the district in that seemingly mysterious way in which news travels in rural communities. Among the crowd was Slick Allen, who had returned to the valley after his release from the county jail.

A partially successful effort had been made to keep the crowd from trampling the ground in the immediate vicinity of the body, but beyond a limited area whatever possible clews the murderer might have left in the shape of footprints had been entirely obliterated long before the officers arrived from Los Angeles.

When the body was finally lifted from its resting place, and placed in the ambulance that had been brought from Los Angeles, one of the detectives picked up a horseshoe that had lain underneath the body. From its appearance it was evident that it had been upon a horse's hoof very recently, and had been torn off by force.

As the detective examined the shoe, several of the crowd pressed forward to look at it. Among them was Allen.

"That's off of young Pennington's horse," he said.

"How do you know that?" inquired the detective.

"I used to work for them—took care of their saddle horses. This young Pennington's horse forges. They had to shoe him special, to keep him from pulling the off fore shoe. I could tell one of his shoes in a million. If they haven't walked all over his tracks, I can tell whether that horse had been up here or not."

He stooped and examined the ground close to where the body had lain.

"There!" he said, pointing. "There's an imprint of one of his hind feet. See how the toe of that shoe is squared off? That was made by the Apache, all right!"

The detective was interested. He studied the hoofprint carefully, and searched for others, but this was the only one he could find.

"Looks like some one had been sweeping this place with a broom," he remarked. "There ain't much of anything shows."

A pimply-faced young man spoke up.

"There was some one sweeping the ground this morning," he said. "About five o'clock this morning I seen a girl dragging the branch of a tree after her, and sweeping along the road below here."

"Did you know her?" asked the detective.

"No—I never seen her before."

"Would you know her if you saw her again?"

"Sure I'd know her! She was a pippin. I'd know her horse, too."

XXXV

Eva was still breathing faintly as the sun dropped behind the western hills. Shannon had not left the house all day. She felt that Custer needed her, that they all needed her, however little she could do to mitigate their grief. There was at least a sense of sharing their burden, and her fine sensibilities told her that this service of love was quite as essential as the more practical help that she would have been glad to offer had it been within her power.

She was standing in the patio with Custer, at sunset, within call of Eva's room, as they had all been during the entire day, when a car drove up along the south drive and stopped at the patio entrance. Three of the four men in it alighted and advanced toward them.

"You are Custer Pennington?" one of them asked.

Pennington nodded.

"And you are Miss Burke—Miss Shannon Burke?"

"I am."

"I am a deputy sheriff. I have a warrant here for your arrest."

"Arrest!" exclaimed Custer. "For what?"

He read the warrant to them. It charged them with the murder of Wilson Crumb.

"I am sorry, Mr. Pennington," said the deputy sheriff; "but I have been given

these warrants, and there is nothing for me to do but serve them."

"You have to take us away now? Can't you wait—until—my sister is dying in there. Couldn't it be arranged so that I could stay here under arrest as long as she lives?"

The deputy shook his head.

"It would be all right with me," he said; "but I have no authority to let you stay. I'll telephone in, though, and see what I can do. Where is the telephone?"

Pennington told him.

"You two stay here with my men," said the deputy sheriff, "while I telephone."

He was gone about fifteen minutes. When he returned, he shook his head.

"Nothing doing," he said. "I have to bring you both in right away."

"May I go to her room and see her again before I leave?" asked Custer.

"Yes," said the deputy; but when Custer turned toward his sister's room, the officer accompanied him.

Dr. Baldwin and one of the nurses were in the room. Young Pennington came and stood beside the bed, looking down on the white face and the tumbled curls upon the pillow. He could not perceive the slightest indication of life, yet they told him that Eva still lived. He knelt and kissed her, and then turned away. He tried to say good-by to her, but his voice broke, and he turned and left the room hurriedly.

Colonel and Mrs. Pennington were in the patio, with Shannon and the officers. The colonel and his wife had just learned of this new blow, and both of them were stunned. The colonel seemed to have aged a generation in that single day. He was a tired, hopeless old man. The heart of his boy and that of Shannon Burke went out to him and to the suffering mother from whom their son was to be taken at this moment in their lives when they needed him most. In their compassion for the older Penningtons they almost forgot the seriousness of their own situation.

At their arraignment, next morning, the preliminary hearing was set for the following Friday. Early in the morning Custer had received word from Ganado that Eva still lived, and that Dr. Baldwin now believed they might hold some slight hope for her recovery.

At Ganado, despair and anxiety had told heavily upon the Penningtons. The colonel felt that he should be in Los Angeles,

to assist in the defense of his son; and yet he knew that his place was with his wife, whose need of him was even greater. Nor would his heart permit him to leave the daughter whom he worshiped, so long as even a faint spark of life remained in that beloved frame.

Mrs. Evans returned from Los Angeles the following day. She was almost prostrated by this last of a series of tragedies ordered, as it seemed, by some malignant fate for the wrecking of her happiness. She told them that Guy appeared to be hopelessly insane. He did not know his mother, nor did he give the slightest indication of any recollection of his past life, or of the events that had overthrown his reason.

At ten o'clock on Wednesday night Dr. Baldwin came into the living room, where the colonel and his wife were sitting with Mrs. Evans. For two days none of them had been in bed. They were tired and haggard, but not more so than the old doctor, who had remained constantly on duty from the moment when he was summoned. Never had man worked with more indefatigable zeal than he to wrest a young life from the path of the grim reaper. There were deep lines beneath his eyes, and his face was pale and drawn, as he entered the room and stood before them; but for the first time in many hours there was a smile upon his lips.

"I believe," he said, "that we are going to save her."

The others were too much affected to speak. So long had hope been denied that now they dared not even think of hope.

"She regained consciousness a few moments ago. She looked up at me and smiled, and then she fell asleep. She is breathing quite naturally now. She must not be disturbed, though. I think it would be well if you all retired. Mrs. Pennington, you certainly must get some sleep—and you too, Mrs. Evans, or I cannot be responsible for the results. I have left word with the night nurse to call me immediately, if necessary, and if you will all go to your rooms I will lie on the sofa here in the living room. I feel at last that it will be safe for me to leave her in the hands of the nurse, and a little sleep won't hurt me."

The colonel took his old friend by the hand.

"Baldwin," he said, "it is useless to try to thank you. I couldn't, even if there were the words to do it with."

"You don't have to, Pennington. I think I love her as much as you do. There isn't any one who knows her who doesn't love her, and who wouldn't have done as much as I. Now, get off to bed all of you, and I think we'll find something to be very happy about by morning. If there is any change for the worse, I will let you know immediately."

In the county jail in Los Angeles, Custer Pennington and Shannon Burke, awaiting trial on charges of a capital crime, were filled with increasing happiness as the daily reports from Ganado brought word of Eva's steady improvement, until at last that she was entirely out of danger.

The tedious preliminaries of selecting a jury were finally concluded. As witness after witness was called, Pennington came to realize for the first time what a web of circumstantial evidence the State had fabricated about him. Even from servants whom he knew to be loyal and friendly the most damaging evidence was elicited. His mother's second maid testified that she had seen him fully dressed in his room late in the evening before the murder, when she had come in, as was her custom, with a pitcher of iced water, not knowing that the young man was there. She had seen him lying upon the bed, with his gun in its holster hanging from the belt about his waist. She also testified that the following morning, when she had come in to make up his bed, she had discovered that it had not been slept in.

The stableman testified that the Apache had been out on the night of the murder. He had rubbed the animal off earlier in the evening, when the defendant had come in from riding. At that time the two had examined the horse's shoes, the animal having just been reshod. He said that on the morning after the murder there were saddle sweat marks on the Apache's back, and that the off fore shoe was missing.

One of the K. K. S. employees testified that a young man, whom he partially identified as Custer, had ridden into their camp about nine o'clock on the night of the murder, and had inquired concerning the whereabouts of Crumb. He said that the young man seemed excited, and upon being told that Crumb was away he had ridden off rapidly toward Sycamore Cañon.

Added to all this were the damaging evidence of the detective who had found the

Apache's off fore shoe under Crumb's body, and the positive identification of the shoe by Allen. The one thing that was lacking—a motive for the crime—was supplied by Allen and the Penningtons' house man.

The latter testified that among his other duties was the care of the hot water heater in the basement of the Pennington home. Upon the evening of Saturday, August 5, he had forgotten to shut off the burner, as was his custom. He had returned about nine o'clock, to do so. When he had left the house by the passageway leading from the basement beneath the south drive and opening on the hillside just above the water gardens, he had seen a man standing by the upper pool, with his arms about a woman, whom he was kissing. It was a bright moonlight night, and the house man had recognized the two as Custer Pennington and Miss Burke. Being embarrassed by having thus accidentally come upon them, he had moved away quietly in the opposite direction, among the shadows of the trees, and had returned to the bunk house.

The connecting link between this evidence and the motive for the crime was elicited from Allen in half an hour of direct examination, which constituted the most harrowing ordeal that Shannon Burke had ever endured; for it laid bare before the world, and before the man she loved, the sordid history of her life with Wilson Crumb. It portrayed her as a drug addict and a wanton; but, more terrible still, it established a motive for the murder of Crumb by Custer Pennington.

Owing to the fact that he had lain in a drunken stupor during the night of the crime, that no one had seen him from the time when the maid entered his room to bring his iced water until his father had found him fully clothed upon his bed at five o'clock the following morning, young Pennington was unable to account for his actions, or to state his whereabouts at the time when the murder was committed.

He realized what the effect of the evidence must be upon the minds of the jurors when he himself was unable to assert positively, even to himself, that he had not left his room that night. Nor was he very anxious to refute the charge against him, since in his heart he believed that Shannon Burke had killed Crumb. He did not even take the stand in his own defense.

The evidence against Shannon was less convincing. A motive had been established

in Crumb's knowledge of her past life and the malign influence that he had had upon it. The testimony of the camp flunky who had seen her obliterating what evidence the trail might have given in the form of hoofprints constituted practically the only direct evidence that was brought against her. It seemed to Custer that the gravest charge that could justly be brought against her was that of accessory after the fact, provided the jury was convinced of his guilt.

Many witnesses testified, giving evidence concerning apparently irrelevant subjects. It was brought out, however, that Crumb died from the effects of a wound inflicted by a forty-five-caliber pistol, that Custer Pennington possessed such a weapon, and that at the time of his arrest it had been found in its holster, with its cartridge belt, thrown carelessly upon his bed.

When Shannon Burke took the stand, all eyes were riveted upon her. They were attracted not only by her youth and beauty, but also by the morbid interest which the frequenters of court rooms would naturally feel in the disclosure of the life she had led at Hollywood. Even to the most sophisticated it appeared incredible that this refined girl, whose soft, well modulated voice and quiet manner carried a conviction of innate modesty, could be the woman whom Slick Allen's testimony had revealed in such a rôle of vice and degradation.

Allen's eyes were fastened upon her with the same intent and searching expression that had marked his attitude upon the occasion of his last visit to the Vista del Paso bungalow, as if he were trying to recall the identity of some half forgotten face.

Though Shannon gave her evidence in a simple, straightforward manner, it was manifest that she was undergoing an intense nervous strain. The story that she told, coming as it did out of a clear sky, unguessed either by the prosecution or by the defense, proved a veritable bombshell to them both. It came after it had appeared that the last link had been forged in the chain that fixed the guilt upon Custer Pennington. She had asked, then, to be permitted to take the stand and tell her story in her own way.

"I did not see Mr. Crumb," she said, "from the time I left Hollywood on the 30th of July, last year, until the afternoon before he was killed; nor had I communicated with him during that time. What

Mr. Allen told you about my having been a drug addict was true, but he did not tell you that Crumb made me what I was, or that after I came to Ganado to live I overcame the habit. I did not live with Crumb as his wife. He used me to peddle narcotics for him. I was afraid of him, and did not want to go back to him. When I left, I did not even let him know where I was going.

"The afternoon before he was killed I met him accidentally in the patio of Colonel Pennington's home. The Penningtons had no knowledge of my association with Crumb. I knew that they wouldn't have tolerated me, had they known what I had been. Crumb demanded that I should return to him, and threatened to expose me if I refused. I knew that he was going to be up in the cañon that night. I rode up there and shot him. The next morning I went back and attempted to obliterate the tracks of my horse, for I had learned from Custer Pennington that it is sometimes easy to recognize individual peculiarities in the tracks of a shod horse. That is all, except that Mr. Pennington had no knowledge of what I did, and no part in it."

Momentarily her statement seemed to overthrow the State's case against Pennington; but that the district attorney was not convinced of its truth was indicated by his cross-examination of her and other witnesses, and later by the calling of new witnesses. They could not shake her testimony, but on the other hand she was unable to prove that she had ever possessed a forty-five-caliber pistol, or to account for what she had done with it after the crime.

During the course of her cross-examination many apparently unimportant and irrelevant facts were adduced, among them the name of the Middle Western town in which she had been born. This trivial bit of testimony was the only point that seemed to make any impression on Allen. Any one watching him at the moment would have seen a sudden expression of incredulity and consternation overspread his face, the hard lines of which slowly gave place to what might, in another, have suggested a semblance of grief.

For several minutes he sat staring intently at Shannon. Then he crossed to the side of her attorney, and whispered a few words in the lawyer's ear. Receiving an assent to whatever his suggestion might have been, he left the court room.

On the following day the defense introduced a new witness in the person of a Japanese who had been a house servant in the bungalow on the Vista del Paso. His testimony substantiated Shannon Burke's statement that she and Crumb had not lived together as man and wife.

Then Allen was recalled to the stand. He told of the last evening that he had spent at Crumb's bungalow, and of the fact that Miss Burke, who was then known to him as Gaza de Lure, had left the house at the same time he did. He testified that Crumb had asked her why she was going home so early; that she had replied that she wanted to write a letter; that he, Allen, had remarked "I thought you lived here," to which she had replied, "I'm here nearly all day, but I go home nights." The witness added that this conversation took place in Crumb's presence, and that the director did not in any way deny the truth of the girl's assertion.

Why Allen should have suddenly espoused her cause was a mystery to Shannon, only to be accounted for upon the presumption that if he could lessen the value of that part of her testimony which had indicated a possible motive for the crime, he might thereby strengthen the case against Pennington, toward whom he still felt enmity, and whom he had long ago threatened to "get."

The district attorney, in his final argument, drew a convincing picture of the crime from the moment when Custer Pennington saddled his horse at the stables at Ganado. He followed him up the cañon to the camp in Jackknife, where he had inquired concerning Crumb, and then down to Sycamore again, where, at the mouth of Jackknife, the lights of Crumb's car would have been visible up the larger cañon.

He demonstrated clearly that a man familiar with the hills, and searching for some one whom sentiments of jealousy and revenge were prompting him to destroy, would naturally investigate this automobile light that was shining where no automobile should be. That the prisoner had ridden out with the intention of killing Crumb was apparent from the fact that he had carried a pistol in a country where, under ordinary circumstances, there was no necessity for carrying a weapon for self-defense. He vividly portrayed the very instant of the commission of the crime—how Pennington leaned from his saddle and shot Crumb

through the heart; the sudden leap of the murderer's horse as he was startled by the report of the pistol, or possibly by the falling body of the murdered man; and how, in so jumping, he had forged and torn off the shoe that had been found beneath Crumb's body.

"And," he said, "this woman knew that he was going to kill Wilson Crumb. She knew it, and she made no effort to prevent it. On the contrary, as soon as it was light enough, she rode directly to the spot where Crumb's body lay, and, as has been conclusively demonstrated by the unimpeachable testimony of an eyewitness, she deliberately sought to expunge all traces of her lover's guilt."

He derided Shannon's confession, which he termed an eleventh hour effort to save a guilty man from the gallows.

"If she killed Wilson Crumb, what did she kill him with?"

He picked up the bullet that had been extracted from Crumb's body.

"Where is the pistol from which this bullet came? Here it is, gentlemen!"

He picked up the weapon that had been taken from Custer's room.

"Compare this bullet with those others that were taken from the clip in the handle of this automatic. They are identical. This pistol did not belong to Shannon Burke. It was never in her possession. No pistol of this character was ever in her possession. Had she had one, she could have told where she obtained it, and whether it had been sold to her or to another; and the records of the seller would show whether or not she spoke the truth. Failing to tell us where she procured the weapon, she could at least lead us to the spot where she had disposed of it. She can do neither, and the reason why she cannot is because she never owned a forty-five-caliber pistol. She never had one in her possession, and therefore she could not have killed Crumb with one."

When at length the case went to the jury, Custer Pennington's conviction seemed a foregone conclusion, while the fate of Shannon Burke was yet in the laps of the gods. The testimony that Allen and the Japanese servant had given in substantiation of Shannon's own statement that her relations with Wilson Crumb had only been those of an accomplice in the disposal of narcotics, removed from consideration the principal motive that she might have had for killing Crumb.

And so there was no great surprise when, several hours later, the jury returned a verdict in accordance with the public opinion of Los Angeles—where, owing to the fact that murder juries are not isolated, such cases are tried largely by the newspapers and the public. They found Custer Pennington, Jr., guilty of murder in the first degree, and Shannon Burke not guilty.

XXXVI

On the day when Custer was to be sentenced, Colonel Pennington and Shannon Burke were present in the court room. Mrs. Pennington had remained at home with Eva, who was slowly convalescing. Shannon reached the court room before the colonel. When he arrived, he sat down beside her, and placed his hand on hers.

"Whatever happens," he said, "we shall still believe in him. No matter what the evidence—and I do not deny that the jury brought in a just verdict in accordance with it—I know that he is innocent. He told me yesterday that he was innocent, and my boy would not lie to me. He thought that you killed Crumb, Shannon. He overheard the conversation between you and Crumb in the patio that day, and he knew that you had good reason to kill the man. He knows now, as we all know, that you did not. Probably it must always remain a mystery. He would not tell me that he was innocent until after you had been proven so. He loves you very much, my girl!"

"After all that he heard here in court? After what I have been? I thought none of you would ever want to see me again."

The colonel pressed her hand.

"Whatever happens," he said, "you are going back home with me. You tried to give your life for my son. If this were not enough, the fact that he loves you, and that we love you, is enough."

Two tears crept down Shannon's cheeks—the first visible signs of emotion that she had manifested during all the long weeks of the ordeal that she had been through. Nothing had so deeply affected her as the magnanimity of the proud old Pennington, whose pride and honor, while she had always admired them, she had regarded as an indication of a certain puritanical narrowness that could not forgive the transgression of a woman.

When the judge announced the sentence, and they realized that Custer Pennington

was to pay the death penalty, although it had been almost a foregone conclusion, the shock left them numb and cold.

Neither the condemned man nor his father gave any outward indication of the effect of the blow. They were Penningtons, and the Pennington pride permitted them no show of weakness before the eyes of strangers. Nor yet was there any bravado in their demeanor. The younger Pennington did not look at his father or Shannon as he was led away toward his cell, between two bailiffs.

As Shannon Burke walked from the court room with the colonel, she could think of nothing but the fact that in two months the man she loved was to be hanged. She tried to formulate plans for his release—wild, quixotic plans; but she could not concentrate her mind upon anything but the bewildering thought that in two months they would hang him by the neck until he was dead.

She knew that he was innocent. Who, then, had committed the crime? Who had murdered Wilson Crumb?

Outside the Hall of Justice she was accosted by Allen, whom she attempted to pass without noticing. The colonel turned angrily on the man. He was in the mood to commit murder himself; but Allen forestalled any outbreak on the old man's part by a pacific gesture of his hands and a quick appeal to Shannon.

"Just a moment, please," he said. "I know you think I had a lot to do with Pennington's conviction. I want to help you now. I can't tell you why. I don't believe he was guilty. I changed my mind recently. If I can see you alone, Miss Burke, I can tell you something that might give you a line on the guilty party."

"Under no conceivable circumstances can you see Miss Burke alone," snapped the colonel.

"I'm not going to hurt her," said Allen. "Just let her talk to me here alone on the sidewalk, where no one can overhear."

"Yes," said the girl, who could see no opportunity pass which held the slightest ray of hope for Custer.

The colonel walked away, but turned and kept his eyes on the man when he was out of earshot. Allen spoke hurriedly to the girl for ten or fifteen minutes, and then turned and left her. When she returned to the colonel, the latter did not question her. When she did not offer to confide in

him, he knew that she must have good reasons for her reticence, since he realized that her sole interest lay in aiding Custer.

For the next two months the colonel divided his time between Ganado and San Francisco, that he might be near San Quentin, where Custer was held pending the day of execution. Mrs. Pennington, broken in health by the succession of blows that she had sustained, was sorely in need of his companionship and help. Eva was rapidly regaining her strength and some measure of her spirit. She had begun to realize how useless and foolish her attempt at self-destruction had been, and to see that the braver and nobler course would have been to give Guy the benefit of her moral support in his time of need.

The colonel, who had wormed from Custer the full story of his conviction upon the liquor charge, was able to convince her that Guy had not played a dishonorable part, and that of the two he had suffered more than Custer. Her father did not condone or excuse Guy's wrongdoing, but he tried to make her understand that it was no indication of a criminal inclination, but rather the thoughtless act of an undeveloped boy.

During the two months they saw little or nothing of Shannon. She remained in Los Angeles, and when she made the long trip to San Quentin to see Custer, or when they chanced to see her, they could not but note how thin and drawn she was becoming. The roses had left her cheeks, and there were deep lines beneath her eyes, in which there was constantly an expression of haunting fear.

As the day of the execution drew nearer, the gloom that had hovered over Ganado for months settled like a dense pall upon them all. On the day before the execution the colonel left for San Francisco, to say good-by to his son for the last time. Custer had insisted that his mother and Eva must not come, and they had acceded to his wish.

On the afternoon when the colonel arrived at San Quentin, he was permitted to see his son for the last time. The two conversed in low tones, Custer asking questions about his mother and sister, and about the little everyday activities of the ranch. Neither of them referred to the event of the following morning.

"Has Shannon been here to-day?" the colonel asked.

Custer shook his head.

"I haven't seen her this week," he said. "I suppose she dreaded coming. I don't blame her. I should like to have seen her once more, though!"

Presently they stood in silence for several moments.

"You'd better go, dad," said the boy. "Go back to mother and Eva. Don't take it too hard. It isn't so bad, after all. I have led a bully life, and I have never forgotten once that I am a Pennington. I shall not forget it to-morrow."

The father could not speak. They clasped hands once, the older man turned away, and the guards led Custer back to the death cell for the last time.

XXXVII

It was morning when the colonel reached the ranch. He found his wife and Eva sitting in Custer's room. They knew the hour, and they were waiting there to be as near him as they could. They were weeping quietly. In the kitchen across the patio they could hear Hannah sobbing.

They sat there for a long time in silence. Suddenly they heard a door slam in the patio, and the sound of some one running.

"Colonel Pennington! Colonel Pennington!" a voice cried.

The colonel stepped to the door of Custer's room. It was the bookkeeper calling him.

"What is it?" he asked. "Here I am."

"The Governor has granted a stay of execution. There is new evidence. Miss Burke is on her way here now. She has found the man who killed Crumb!"

What more he said the colonel did not hear, for he had turned back into the room, and, collapsing on his son's bed, had broken into tears—he who had gone through those long weeks like a man of iron.

It was nearly noon before Shannon arrived. She had been driven from Los Angeles by an attaché of the district attorney's office. The Penningtons had been standing on the east porch, watching the road with binoculars, so anxious were they for confirmation of their hopes.

She was out of the car before it had stopped and was running toward them. The man who had accompanied her followed, and joined them on the porch. Shannon threw her arms around Mrs. Pennington's neck.

"He is safe!" she cried. "Another has

confessed, and has satisfied the district attorney of his guilt."

"Who was it?" they asked.

Shannon turned toward Eva.

"It is going to be another blow to you all," she said; "but wait until I'm through, and you will understand that it could not have been otherwise. It was Guy who killed Wilson Crumb."

"Guy? Why should he have done it?"

"That was it. That was why suspicion was never directed toward him. Only he knew the facts that prompted him to commit the deed. It was Allen who suggested to me the possibility that it might have been Guy. I have spent nearly two months at the sanatorium with this gentleman from the district attorney's office, in an effort to awaken Guy's sleeping intellect to a realization of the past, and of the present necessity for recalling it. He has been improving steadily, but it was only yesterday that memory returned to him. We worked on the theory that if he could be made to realize that Eva lived, the cause of his mental sickness would be removed. We tried everything, and we had almost given up hope when, almost like a miracle, his memory returned, while he was looking at a kodak picture of Eva that I had shown him. The rest was easy, especially after he knew that she had recovered. Instead of the necessity for confession resulting in a further shock, it seemed to inspirit him. His one thought was of Custer, his one hope that we would be in time to save him."

"Why did he kill Crumb?" asked Eva.

"Because Crumb killed Grace. He told me the whole story yesterday."

Very carefully Shannon related all that Guy had told of Crumb's relations with his sister, up to the moment of Grace's death.

"I am glad he killed him!" said Eva. "I would have had no respect for him if he hadn't done it."

"Guy told me that the evening before he killed Crumb he had been looking over a motion picture magazine, and he had seen there a picture of Crumb which tallied with the photograph he had taken from Grace's dressing table—a portrait of the man who, as she told him, was responsible for her trouble. Guy had never been able to learn this man's identity, but the picture in the magazine, with his name below it, was a reproduction of the same photograph. There was no question as to the man's identity. The scarfpin, and a lock of hair fall-

ing in a peculiar way over the forehead, marked the pictures as identical. Though Guy had never seen Crumb, he knew from conversations that he had heard here that it was Wilson Crumb who was directing the picture that was to be taken on Ganado. He immediately got his pistol, saddled his horse, and rode up to the camp in search of Crumb. It was he whom one of the witnesses mistook for Custer. He then did what the district attorney attributed to Custer. He rode to the mouth of Jackknife, and saw the lights of Crumb's car up near El Camino Largo. While he was in Jackknife, Eva must have ridden down Sycamore from her meeting with Crumb, passing Jackknife before Guy rode back into Sycamore. He rode up to where Crumb was attempting to crank his engine. Evidently the starter had failed to work, for Crumb was standing in front of the car, in the glare of the headlights, attempting to crank it. Guy accosted him, charged him with the murder of Grace, and shot him. He then started for home by way of El Camino Largo. Half a mile up the trail he dismounted and hid his pistol and belt in a hollow tree. Then he rode home.

"He told me that while he never for an instant regretted his act, he did not sleep all that night, and was in a highly nervous condition when the shock of Eva's supposed death unbalanced his mind; otherwise he would gladly have assumed the guilt of Crumb's death at the time when Custer and I were accused.

"After we had obtained Guy's confession, Allen gave us further information tending to prove Custer innocent. He said he could not give it before without incriminating himself; and as he had no love for Custer, he did not intend to hang for a crime he had not committed. He knew that he would surely hang if he confessed the part that he had played in formulating the evidence against Custer.

"Crumb had been the means of sending Allen to the county jail, after robbing him of several thousand dollars. The day before Crumb was killed, Allen's sentence expired. The first thing he did was to search for Crumb, with the intention of killing the man. He learned at the studio where Crumb was, and he followed him immediately. He was hanging around the camp out of sight, waiting for Crumb, when he heard the shot that killed him. His inves-

tigation led him to Crumb's body. He was instantly overcome by the fear, induced by his guilty conscience, that the crime would be laid at his door. In casting about for some plan by which he might divert suspicion from himself, he discovered an opportunity to turn it against a man whom he hated. The fact that he had been a stableman on Ganado, and was familiar with the customs of the ranch, made it an easy thing for him to go to the stables, saddle the Apache, and ride him up Sycamore to Crumb's body. Here he deliberately pulled the off fore shoe from the horse and hid it under Crumb's body. Then he rode back to the stable, unsaddled the Apache, and made his way to the village.

"The district attorney said that we need have no fear but that Custer will be exonerated and freed. And, Eva"—she turned to the girl with a happy smile—"I have it very confidentially that there is small likelihood that any jury in southern California will convict Guy, if he bases his defense upon a plea of insanity."

"One thing I don't understand, Shannon, is what you were doing brushing the road with a bough from a tree, on the morning after the killing of Crumb, if you weren't trying to obliterate some one's tracks."

"That's just what I was trying to do," said Shannon. "Ever since Custer taught me something about tracking, it has held a certain fascination for me, so that I often try to interpret the tracks I see along the trails in the hills. It was because of this, I suppose, that I immediately recognized the Apache's tracks around the body of Crumb. I immediately jumped to the conclusion that Custer had killed him, and I did what I could to remove this evidence. As it turned out, my efforts did more harm than good, until Allen's explanation cleared up the matter."

"And why," asked the colonel, "did Allen undergo this sudden change of heart?"

Shannon turned toward him, her face slightly flushed, though she looked him straight in the eyes as she spoke.

"It is a hard thing for me to tell you," she said. "Allen is a bad man—a very bad man; yet in the worst of men there is a spark of good. Allen told me this morning, in the district attorney's office, what it was that had kindled to life the spark of good in him. He is my father."

A Bride from the Sea

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE STRANGE CRUISE OF THE
SEAFARER AND HER CREW OF A SAILOR, A
LANDSMAN, AND A GIRL

By Captain A. E. Dingle

Author of "Three Palms Cay," "Ships of Strife," etc.

CURIOSITY carries many of the daily tally of loungers to the Battery, idleness many others, laziness and hopelessness most of the rest. For the curious there is the seething activity of the vast port of New York, with the Statue of Liberty ever facing toward the east, and the antiquated ferryboats rubbing shoulders with colossal queens of the ocean traffic. The idle find the warm hours pass without irk in the salt breeze and bright sunlight. For the lazy there are benches, for the hopeless the delicious proximity of the all-healing sea, whenever their hopelessness becomes so real as to urge them over the stringpiece—always supposing the meddlesome gentleman in blue, whose duty it is to discourage hopelessness, is not too strongly in evidence.

But none of these motives, reasons, whatever term applies, seemed to fit Rupert Whately as he sat, elbows on knees, cane to lips, bovinely watching the poppling water and the busy craft. Stout, full-fed, smooth of skin, dressed like a tailor's model, and not more than thirty years old, he looked as if in his college days he might have been a doughty oarsman, footballer, or track man, had he not preferred ease and full fare to Spartan training.

What he saw in the scene before his eyes was not apparent to the casual onlooker. Curiosity scarcely fitted him. He looked like a man who had never had to leave any desire ungratified. He was too plump and rosy to wear hopelessness with success, and too indifferent to merit such a term as mere laziness.

A forty-thousand-ton steamer sweeping grandly past the Battery brought never a

flicker to his eyelids. The onslaught of a mob of shrieking youngsters seeking a rolling ball between his highly polished shoes gave him no concern at all. He looked out over the harbor with the gaze of a man without interest in life, in the world, or in the hereafter.

Into his field of vision flashed a white sail, utterly out of place among the belching, bustling monsters of steam and smoke. It was a small sloop, not more than thirty feet long over all, though to a seamanly eye having all the earmarks of stout seaworthiness and handiness. She floated close to the sea wall, her sails flapping in the calms of the wharf, as if she had been trapped by tide and river current into an eddy from which the wind was too light to rescue her. She was a pretty bit of marine life, with her two brown-faced young men struggling with sweep and boat hook to fend her from the wall.

Still Whately's bovine indifference remained unshaken.

A mild raising of the eyebrows showed that he heard the sudden chorus that followed a sharp yell from the little craft. He glanced over, and saw one of the crew fishing with the boat hook for his mate, between boat and wall.

"Boom knocked him over!" a loungeer yelled, craning his neck in the effort to see all the horrid details. "He'll git all smashed up ag'in' the wall!"

"Why don't somebody call the cop, or somepin?" suggested another man.

As Whately strolled down to the water-side—his curiosity aroused at last, though but mildly—the man with the boat hook got a good hold and hauled his mate on

board, unconscious, and bleeding badly from a wound in the head.

"Want any help? I'm a first aid sort of chap," Whately offered.

"Hell, I'm all that myself," retorted the sailor, peering dazedly into his mate's white face. "This looks like a regular sawbones job. Here, one of you catch a line!"

The boat was made fast. A policeman lounged by, glanced down, and promptly hurried back and turned in an ambulance call. When the doctor arrived the injured man had revived under the assiduous ministrations of his companion, aided clumsily and uselessly by the elephantine Whately, who slopped water over his own shiny shoes and got blood upon his immaculate pants without in any way helping the work along. Never once discarding the cane that was crooked over his arm, or his expensive Panama hat, he staggered and lurched to the uneasy motion of the little sloop, and filled the scene with his uselessness.

"Get out o' the way, both of you!" the doctor ordered tersely.

There and then the first germ of mutual antagonism was implanted in the bosoms of Rupert Whately and Tom Barker. Barker, the sailor, resented the imputation that he, the efficient, the injured man's chum, was on a level with the fat and exquisite Whately, who, uninvited, had thrust his futile bulk into affairs with which he had no concern. As for Whately, he considered that his services had gone far toward reviving the hurt mariner. In his placid, bovine way he disliked Barker before he knew him, and felt himself injured at being classed with him by this brisk and efficient doctor.

"Lend a hand here—I'll take him to the hospital," the doctor said, when he finished his examination.

"Hospital nothing!" the prostrate man feebly protested, striving to rise, but falling back with a groan. "I'm making this voyage!"

"You'll take a longer voyage than ever you expected, unless I can get properly to work on you mighty quick! Here, you, help me up with him," he told Whately.

"Say, doc," Barker put in anxiously, "is it that bad, honest? Can't you patch him up so he can make the trip? It means a whole lot to both of us."

"He'll be patched up in three months, if he isn't dead," was the reply. "Come on, now—raise him up!"

As the ambulance clanged away, Tom Barker sat himself down with a crash on the cabin top and fell to cursing his luck, the day he was born, and the evil genius which had led him to coast the New York shore.

Whately watched the departing vehicle out of sight, then turned toward the sloop again. He looked rather less of the dude now, with his shoes and nether garments smeared with blood and water; but the cigarette he lit was the smoke of the elect, and the diamond that flashed in the sun as he raised a fat white hand to light it was such a stone as none but the elect might wear without attracting vulgar attention.

"There goes the planning of a lifetime, darn it!" shouted the lone sailor, shaking a fist in the direction of the ambulance. "Every darned thing we've ever dreamed about gone west because, like a darned fool, I wanted to show off to the folks ashore, and Jim, like a darned fool too, couldn't dodge the boom!"

Like a bag of tallow, Rupert Whately dropped down on the narrow deck, cane, panama, diamond, and all, and seated himself alongside Barker.

"What's all the trouble?" he asked.

Something in the sailor's utter exasperation told him that underlying it must be some tremendous reason which his own small experience of real life had missed.

Barker scowled at him, swore, and maintained a sullen silence; but Whately's curiosity had awakened after years of slothful sleep, and he persevered.

"Tell me! Perhaps I can suggest something, or—I might be able to help."

"Help? You?"

Again there leaped between the men a subtle flash of antagonism. Whately's well-fleshed bosom swelled just a bit with resentment at the other's tone; but he replied placidly:

"I helped you with your mate, you know."

He never wondered why Barker's scowl turned into a grin.

"Say, Fat, I guess any help you ever gave to anybody was by way of accident," the sailor said. "You're soft and fat. You look too darned prosperous ever to have had to do more than reach out and pick melons off the vine. Thanks all the same; but if you'll just climb back ashore I'll push off and think things over in some quieter place."

"Have a pill and tell me the tale," Whately persisted, offering his cigarette case.

Barker laughed shortly, took a cigarette with an air of resignation, dropped a fender between his boat and the wall, and flung back over his shoulder:

"If you and a pal had sold up everything, added the proceeds to your savings, and bought a boat, with the idea of making a world-beating small boat voyage, and then friend pal gets his fool head knocked silly by the main boom before quitting the harbor, wouldn't it jar you too?"

Whately regarded him with a queer mixture of puzzlement and curiosity.

"But why make such a fuss about it? I should think you'd be glad to be shown how idiotic the whole notion is, going to sea in this blooming cockleshell. What's the idea behind the thing, anyhow? You can't carry freight, and surely you don't expect to get passengers? Can't you sail about in Long Island Sound until you get enough of it? Seems a silly ass sort of notion to me."

Barker's blue eyes glittered, and his grinning lips thinned to a straight line. "Say, I called you 'Fat' just now, fellow! That's your class. I don't suppose you ever in your life wanted to do anything with a spice in it. Never felt the urge to see what's behind the horizon, did you? Never wanted to match your wits and sinews against the best old ocean had in store, did you? Sure you didn't! Always had a valet, didn't you? And when you went sailing you had a shiny little boat with a shiny little captain, and pa paid the bills, and you never got your shiny little feet wet? Get ashore, friend. You'll get seasick if you stay here!"

"And you only want to sail over the seas to battle with storms and all that sort of thing?" queried Whately, with a wide stare of his placid eyes. "That's rather a notion, don't you know! And you can't go now because of the accident to your chum? Can't get another sailor chap?"

"D'ye think they're so easy to find?" snapped Barker. "D'ye think it's just a matter of getting aboard and letting her go? D'ye think the man is so easy to find who could stand up under hammering at sea, keep grinning when things go bad, and never let his partner down? Hell, get ashore, Fat! I'm sore at the world."

Whately got to his feet, peered down the

little cabin hatch at the dim interior, and tugged off the one glove he wore.

"You've aroused my curiosity," he said. "There's something queer in that idea of seeing what's over the sea line. My name's Whately—Rupert Whately. I'll go along with you. Tell me what to do. Let's start!"

Barker uttered an exasperated growl.

"Start out with you? Say, see this? Feel it!"

He extended an arm as brown and as hard as a teakwood timber. Whately sympathetically felt the sinewy member, and then tentatively fingered his own huge, fat forearm. Barker was eying him with contempt, his gaze traveling up and down the expensive clothes and white skin.

"You'd die in a week, Fat, and all the intervening days you'd be dog-sick and sorry. See my working rig? How d'ye get the idea you can go to sea in the shape you're in? Can you eat bacon and beans, and salt hoss, and tinned mule, month after month? Get up on the dock! Honest, I'm tired."

"Lend me some things," Whately returned, throwing his gloves at a staring youngster craning over the wall to listen to the argument.

"What things?" Barker almost screamed. "What he-man's clothes d'ye think 'll fit a soft, fat slob like you? Shove off ashore, I tell you!"

Whately tossed his cane overboard, and pitched his Panama hat after it.

"I've got nothing that 'll fit anybody fatter than me," said Barker, eying the stout man in amazement, and deciding that he was mad. "My togs would surely fit you by the time you landed, though," he added, grinning sourly. "You'd lose all that fat. Better hike ashore before you ditch all your togs and get run in by the police for indecorous behavior!"

Whately unbuttoned his coat and vest, took his pocketbook from the inside coat pocket, and transferred it to his trousers, as he did his cigarette case and a few letters. Then, remarking that in that case his present clothes would be useless upon landing, he tossed the coat after the cane and hat.

"That's that, then," he said. "Now let's go. What do I do first?"

Barker capitulated to the man's immovable obstinacy. He cast off the shore rope, stuck the main halyards into Whately's

pudgy fist, and thrust the sloop from the wall with the oar.

"Hoist away!" he snapped. "Don't blame me if you wish yourself dead!"

II

LONG before the harbor was cleared, the Seafarer's new acquisition learned something of the task he had set himself. As the little sloop beat down the channel, against the incoming tide, Whately's soft hands grew red and blistered under the grilling work of handling the small, hard ropes of the jib sheets.

Barker had thought of changing the rig, so as to work the headsail on a single sheet and traveler, for convenience; but as he watched the fat fellow clumsily letting go and hauling the sheets, he grinned happily, closely watching for signs of repentance—which never appeared, however.

When the lightship was well astern, and the long sea swell made itself felt, Whately's job was lighter, truly, but his lot was deplorable. Staggering and clawing to hold on, he turned a doubtful face toward Barker, and stammered:

"Is it going to be as rough as this, old chap?"

And Barker replied with almost ghoulish relish:

"I don't expect to be able to stay on deck without lashing after to-night, Fat!"

When the shore lights began to wink, and the fresh breeze sank to an evening air of baffling lightness, Barker, urged by a devil of mischief, sent Whately below to get supper. To a green stomach there was sufficient motion on the slowly heaving fine-weather swell to arouse uneasiness. What the little twelve-by-ten cabin, with stove and every living convenience afforded by the sloop contained therein, would be like to Whately was no joke.

"Don't be fussy," Barker told him nonchalantly. "Just fry up some bacon fat, and dump a can of beans in it. That 'll do for now. We'll begin regular cooking to-morrow."

Every few minutes, when the smoke from the galley stack showed that the fire, at least, had been lighted successfully, Whately's heavy bulk could be heard thudding down on the bunks, first on one side, then on the other. The reek of sizzling grease was everywhere. Barker's smile was as the smile on the face of the tiger.

Like a human avalanche reversing its

natural downward course, Whately plunged on deck, green of visage, sprawled over the rail, and gave tribute to Neptune.

"Looks like breezing up, Fat," remarked Barker with an expressionless face, as Whately turned a lugubrious eye toward him.

The fat man staggered bravely below again, and presently reappeared as hurriedly as before; but this time, before taking to the rail, he managed to set a frying pan full of smoking beans on the deck beside Barker.

"Get the bread, and a couple of forks," ordered his pitiless skipper.

Barker seemed to ignore the landsman's distress; but even the sailor's hard face softened a bit, and his keen eyes lighted up with the courageous man's inevitable tribute to sheer grit, when Whately, pale as a green-tinted ghost, stumbled back into the reeking cabin and brought up the bread and one fork.

"Not at all hungry, old chap," he said. "Had a tremendous lunch just before I met you."

He hastily dropped bread and fork, and resumed his forlorn attitude at the rail, while his comrade ate with hearty sea appetite and steered his little ship into the gathering night.

At eight o'clock Barker showed Whately how to steer, and rolled himself in a rug on deck. The lights of Seabright shone resplendent in the west. There was still little wind, and the sea inshore was glassy; but down in the northwest a bank of cloud obscured the horizon, and before lying down Barker had taken care to have reefing earrings handy by the wheel.

By ten o'clock the wind grew gusty and hot, the cloud bank had crept around from northwest to southwest. Whately anxiously noticed the increasing angle of the Seafarer as she began to tear through the curling seas; but he never thought of arousing Barker until a little sea crest was torn off and hurled in his face. Then he called nervously:

"I say, Barker, old chap, it's getting beastly rough! Is it all right?"

Barker sat up, turned his eye to windward, and leaped to his feet in haste.

"Give me those earrings!" he snapped, pitching his blanket into the cabin.

Whately gazed around dazedly.

"Come on—those ropes! Oh, damn it yes, hurry!" roared Barker.

He snatched the earrings from a shaking hand and clawed his way to the mainsail halyards, to lower away the sail for reefing.

"Pull in the sheet as the sail comes down!" he yelled. "That's right—haul it in! Now make it fast. Here, come and pass this earring while I haul out the clew. Oh, blast such a fat lump anyhow! Is there nothing you can do? Here!"

Whately obeyed courageously, though he needed both hands for his own security as the little craft leaped and swooped under the rising of the seas. Barker worked silently, expertly, snapping out instructions as to the knotting of reef points when the sail was down and hauled out taut.

Under the headsail the sloop turned from the wind and sailed herself, until the mainsail was double-reefed. Then Barker dived below to get the smaller jib. Whately crouched in the cockpit, shrinking from the stinging spray that pelted him, his eyes smarting from the brine, his stomach again calling loudly for surrender.

The shoreward lights had all but vanished in the driving murk, and the gusts of wind were heavier and more frequent. One sharp gust became a squall, and the Seafarer leaned to it giddily. When it passed, screaming, Whately gasped in the abrupt cessation of pressure, astonished at the ominous stillness.

In the instant before the real gale smote upon the sloop he fancied he heard a cry out on the black water near by. He bent all his faculties to listen. There it was again—unmistakably a human cry.

"Barker!" he cried excitedly. "Barker, there's somebody calling out here!"

Barker staggered up, fumbling at the lashings of the sail he bore, and followed Whately's shaking indication of direction.

"Sea gulls!" he snorted, and plunged toward the bowsprit to shift the jibs.

"There it is again, right by you!" yelled Whately.

He crawled after Barker, leaving the wheel to take care of itself. Drowning the skipper's angry roar came the splintering crash of wood against the sloop's bows, and Whately was knocked down by a sharp impact. Vaguely he saw Barker lean down under the soaring bows, hanging precariously by one hand, while he snatched at something with the other. Then the sloop leaned dizzily, recovered, and a smashed and waterlogged sailing dory, with broken mast and dragging sail, passed astern.

Barker was cursing him for leaving the wheel in the same breath that yelled:

"Here, catch hold! Blasted useless lump! Want to capsize us, don't you?"

Barker sprang to the wheel to bring the sloop up. Whately found himself desperately clawing for support with one hand, while in his free arm he held the dripping figure of a bathing-suited girl, who was laughing hysterically up into his dumfounded face.

III

MARY STERRETT came out of the sea like a veritable daughter of Neptune. She established herself as such, and lighted a flame of admiration in two susceptible hearts, within five minutes of her advent into the little fellowship of the Seafarer.

"Take her into the cabin, fill her with hot coffee, and then find her a blanket," Barker shouted, intently watching the hissing seas that rolled out of the north and west with ominous weight.

Whately tried his best to obey, but it was a poor best. For all her shivering chill, the girl laughed understandingly. She slipped from his arm and glided toward the cockpit.

"It looks as if the poor man was hardly seasoned yet," she said to Barker. "I'm cold, but I'm not out of action. Give me the wheel, and you make coffee for all of us. Wasn't it lucky you ran me down?"

Whately clawed his way into the shelter of the cockpit and slumped in a heap upon the floor. Every nerve in his soft body yelled in the reaction from his late excitement. Every red corpuscle in his sluggish blood shrieked out against the implication cast upon his manhood by the girl's innocent remark.

He wanted to protest; but protest died when he saw Barker's face light with pleased surprise as, without a word, he relinquished sweater coat and helm to the drenched girl, and entered the cabin to follow her suggestion.

A great pot of boiling coffee, and biscuits in the hand, put warmth into chilled frames and set blood to bounding again. Little was said, for the gale that now blew was a real one, with roaring seas that soared high above the little craft, and a wind that shrieked and spat salty spume into brine-caked faces, preventing speech. In the shelter of the deep cockpit the three huddled, Barker resuming the helm from the

comparative elevation of an upturned bucket, in order that he might keep an alert eye upon the tremendous seas.

Wrapped in the sweater, with the oil-skin jacket and trousers of Barker's lost shipmate—useless as wearing apparel for Whately's bulk—Mary Sterrett drank her coffee out of a graniteware cup, ate her hardtack, and seemed positively to purr amidst the elemental uproar.

"Do you call this rough now, Barker?" stammered poor Whately, as he set his mug down and watched it slide to leeward and turn upside down.

Mary laughed joyously, and answered for the helmsman.

"It's getting rough, surely. I'm not a bit sorry to be aboard this big ship instead of my little dismayed dory!"

"But Barker doesn't think it's—" persisted Whately.

"I think," interrupted Barker, "if I don't get the mains'l off her, it won't need to get any rougher to convince you. Miss, take her again. She'll run fine under the jib alone."

Through an anxious night and a gray, tempestuous day the little Seafarer drove before a storm that rose to hurricane force. Tenderly handled by Barker, who seemed tireless, and by Mary, whose skill as a helmswoman was only surpassed by the amazing coolness with which she accepted her situation, the emergence of the small craft from successive encounters with seemingly overwhelming seas filled Whately with wonder. Confidence came next. Toward the climax of the blow he let his head sink drowsily against the hard, wet wood; and when he awoke he felt a different man.

All about them the broad Atlantic roared and hissed like a gray demon of spite. Overhead the sky looked as if a malign spirit had drawn a smoky pall across its face, blotting out sun and daylight, although the hour was high noon.

Mary sat at the wheel again, rosy and smiling. Withal there was perhaps a trace of darkness under her bright eyes, and her long brown hair was plastered about her face and neck by the brine. Barker slept soundly and not over quietly, with his crisp curls jammed into a bucket for a pillow.

"Awake at last?" the girl cried, as Whately sat up. "Do you think you could find us something to eat?"

Whately grimaced toward Barker, then glanced dubiously at the chaotic ocean.

"Yes, I know," the girl said, anticipating his remark. "I feel a bit afraid myself; but he's tired out, and I won't wake him until I feel absolutely terrified. If you don't feel like going below, take the wheel, and let me. I think I'm more of a sailor than you."

Whately felt hungry; but the thought of that stuffy cabin with its bilgewater aromas was ghastly, and he took the wheel. Every sea that passed under the sloop rolled her down until the gunwales dipped deeply, or sent her soaring aloft until bowsprit and boom end, in turn, bade fair to harpoon the ocean bed. To look astern at the following mountains of water made Whately feel as if he was caught in a corner, and a cliff was actually falling upon him. He turned sick at the notion, and the face he set rigidly ahead thereafter was white and drawn.

A rift in the sooty sky to the southward seemed to promise a break in the weather; but the behavior of the sea and the blustery howl of the wind suggested that the promise lied. There was a periodical lull, followed by a regular recurrence of the full force of the wind, which scared Whately. Still he refused to call Barker. That slip of a girl, with nobody yet knew what bitter story lying behind her rescue, could carry on; then so could he.

Once the Seafarer leaned down to the gusts until the lee deck was filled with foaming sea, and the upturned lifeboat cracked and strained at the lashings. Whately's lips opened to summon Barker. Mary's voice called to him jestingly, demanding to know whether he meant to turn them over, and he wanted to retort in a similar tone; but he had no time. The weight of water under the lifeboat held the little sloop down for just the few seconds when she should have recovered herself, and another colossal sea rolled down upon her.

The lifeboat lashings parted with a crash. Only one rope held the boat by the stem, and oars and water jugs hurtled out. Whately, driven by instinct, leaped to save the wreckage.

"Barker!" he yelled. "Barker!"

Barker was on his feet before the yell fairly pealed out, and the girl ran up from the cabin with hands full of bread and beef, wide-eyed and startled.

The decks were already free of water again. Water jugs and oars lay across the

cockpit, where Whately had hurled them without thought of direction; but for an instant Whately himself was out of the picture.

They saw him in a moment. Gripping the main rigging desperately was a fat white hand. To the fat white hand a fat white arm was attached. Then came the soft, fat body of Whately, another fat white arm, and a tense, straining left hand. This latter hand gripped, as desperately as its fellow clutched the rigging, the short-snapped painter of the lifeboat, which dragged alongside, full of water, like a ton of watery doom.

Every roll the sloop gave plunged Whately deep into the sea. His face was appalling, registering the extremity of fear and physical stress. Still he held his grip. He would hold that until he cracked apart. That's how he would show these superior folks that he had his uses!

That Barker at that minute would have cared little for the loss of the boat mattered not a bit. Whately didn't know that, anyhow. He only knew that he had saved the boat, if somebody would only save him before nature chipped in and the sea tore his arms out.

"Come here, you dumbbell!" he panted.

Barker was at his side in a flash, grinning appreciatively.

The near loss of the boat came in what proved to be the peak of the gale. Before the soothing grease had well soaked into Whately's tortured arms and hands, the sun showed a watery eye through a transparent veil of scudding cloud, and the wind had noticeably eased.

Mary's lunch was forgotten in the activity of refastening the boat securely. When they could think of food again, the sea had subsided at least sufficiently to enable Barker to cook a hot meal.

When the moon rose that night, and the stars appeared at last over a horizon containing enough clear spaces to give a chance of an observation for position, sextant and chronometer were brought up, and the Seafarer's whereabouts ascertained. Mary, pausing in the act of collecting the supper utensils for washing, waited for the result with something of anxiety in her face, but perhaps more of curiosity. Barker used the modern methods, as far as they were adaptable to small boat navigation. Before bringing up his instrument he had calculated his altitude, and thence his zenith

distance, and had pricked off on his chart his assumed position deducted from estimated speed and drift. He took a star well to the eastward, and therefrom secured a position line, which he set off from the supposed position by the amount his observed zenith distance differed from the calculated one. Then a short and simple star latitude calculation gave him a line to cross the first line with.

"That little breeze just blew us three hundred miles straight into the Atlantic," he announced to Mary, with an apologetic grin. "That's just about how far you are from home, miss!"

"Oh!" Mary chirped, clapping her hands; but she saw Barker's anxious face as he regarded her intently, and her own face became serious. "I have no home," she said soberly. "I live in hotels. If you are worrying about me, please don't. When I put off from Seabright in that little open dory, I knew I was foolish, for the storm warning had been received; but I felt like doing something mad. I was driven off, dismasted, and caught in the first of the gale. That's how you came to find me adrift, with nothing on but a bathing suit. Don't bother about where I belong. I won't have you think for a moment of my getting back. You are bound for Bermuda, you say, first of all. Very well! I'll sail to Bermuda with you. I can cable my bankers from there for funds, if by that time you have both become tired of my company."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Whately. "You're not the sort one soon tires of, don't you know!"

Barker flashed a glance at him, and it was tinged with the challenge of the male. In the comparative calm and security following the storm, the fat, soft man of inaction put on the airs and mannerisms of his kind. The tough-fibered, iron-hard sailor caught the hint of superiority over his own sterling but rugged manhood, and he resented it bitterly; but he had no words to readily fit the case. He merely added his word of welcome to Mary, and turned in to sleep.

Womanlike, Mary knew exactly how things were shaping. She sat beside Whately during two hours of his watch, singing him little snatches of light, lilting songs, not wholly disconnected with moonlight and other romantic things. She perceived the sharp difference between the two men. She

saw the obvious mark of her own class in Whately, and recognized the rough virility of Barker.

A little before midnight she stretched herself luxuriously toward the mellow moonlight, and bade Whately good night.

"If you have to call anybody before eight bells, call me," she smiled. "Never call a man in his watch below, if you can help it."

"B-but how about yourself?" Whately blustered.

"I am not a man, sir. Good night!"

She vanished below in a soft ripple of laughter; but long after he thought her asleep she lay watching his face in the bright light of the moon, as he sat and steered with little thought for course or compass.

IV

THE calm after the storm entered into the Seafarer's scheme of things as with other greater and more populous ships. It brought, or induced, a condition of reaction as sharply defined as the contrast in the weather.

As the little sloop sailed the warm waters of the Gulf Stream, under the softest of breezes and brightest of skies, Mary's bathing suit became as adequate a costume as it had been inadequate when she was picked up. That was all very well, for when she had survived one day dressed in the clothes of Barker's original shipmate, both she and the two men decided that as emergency gear those clothes were good, but as a sensible outfit for balmy days and small boat work over-sized overalls did not compare with her own neat beach attire.

"You'll get all scorched up, though," suggested Whately solicitously.

"I'm not even afraid of freckles," she retorted.

Barker joined in her quiet smile, for Whately had asked him that same morning whether he had anything that would protect an unaccustomed skin from sunburn. Mary had overheard the inquiry. Whately possessed a sense of humor which permitted him to detect the subtle gibe at himself, and he colored painfully.

"Oh, I know how I shape up with both of you," he said; "but I'm not so utterly helpless in some things. I know that as a sailor, even Miss Mary can beat me; but when I was at college I could swim with the best. I once rowed in a race, and I still

have a medal for golf. I'm fat, Barker, and your clothes are a long way from fitting me yet, but—"

"Don't be a goof," Barker cut in with a friendly grin. He felt that he could afford to show friendliness, since Mary had started to take a rise out of his fleshy comrade. "Can't you take a joke? We know you've got a lot of sand under that soft outer envelope. Why, man, nobody could have done a pluckier thing than you did in saving the lifeboat, even though it was more than a bit crazy."

"Crazy!"

Whately glared angrily. In his own modest estimation he felt that he had done a he-man's act during those perilous minutes but recently passed.

"Sure it was crazy. You might easily have lost the sloop, and us along with it, by leaving the wheel; but it was as plucky as it was crazy, old chap, and I hand it to you. All the same, why in the name of Noah's sacred cow you ever wished yourself in on this trip beats me, for what you don't know about the sea would overload and sink a bigger ship than this!"

"Why did Mary put to sea in a bathing suit and a bit of a box of a boat?" Whately retorted, with reason all on his side.

Mary laughed softly.

"I shouldn't wonder if my reasons closely resembled your own," she said. "I do know the sea, of course. I love it. I have sailed boats ever since I was big enough to grip a tiller; but perhaps that is the only point of difference between us. I have no immediate relatives, and no friends that matter, except idlers of the social set, and others who hold the absurd idea that Mary Sterrett and the Sterrett money mean the same thing. I had sailed my little dory day after day for a month, and it grew monotonous. We heard of the storm warning. My aunt, an ancient monument of virtue and timidity, forbade me to sail that day; so of course I sailed farther than ever before. And I am glad. I confess I was a bit frightened when the storm overtook me with a broken mast and no oars, and swamped me; but the thrill was worth while, after all, and here I am, living out the dream of my life!"

The girl paused, her bright face glowing with enthusiasm, her dancing eyes alight with sheer enjoyment. She fixed her gaze on Whately, turning away from Barker's hotly admiring stare.

"But surely no such urge of waywardness tumbled you into such a voyage?" she said.

"More likely the urge of colossal ignorance," Barker rejoined, with a note of contempt creeping into his voice. "Why did you insist, Whately? What made you think the trip so easy that you could make it? The way you chucked your togs and cane overboard made me think of somebody aching to escape from something threatening. I didn't think much about it then, but I have since."

Whately was silent for a while. His forehead wrinkled, and his eyes glowed darkly. Barker grew uneasy, for he was as good a fellow at heart as any true seaman is likely to be, and for all his gibes he had no wish to hurt his shipmate in any manner—unless, perhaps, in a contest for the smiles of their fair passenger.

Whately's answer quieted his fears.

"I did want to escape from something damnably threatening," the landsman said; "but not in any such way as you probably imagine, Barker. Perhaps, away down deep, my reasons were not so different from Miss Sterrett's."

He ceased speaking.

"What do you mean?" inquired Barker, after a moment's silence.

"All my life, since leaving college, there has been nothing left unarranged for me," Whately went on. "I was unable even to chuck a bluff at business. Whenever I needed cash, I simply went to my agent and got it, never bothering where it came from. Golf soon wearied me, polo was far too strenuous when I began to put on flesh, the luxury of the modern bathtub made swimming a bore for a man naturally lazy. There was far too much money, and a darned sight too much of the adulation that money brings; no necessity for work, not a single human interest in my life. Barker, even when I saw your boat jammed against the Battery wall, I felt nothing of a thrill until your mate went overboard, and you began to curse the luck that prevented you carrying out a voyage that sounded like lunacy to me. Then, suddenly, I saw something more than luxury in it. The idea of two young chaps starting out alone on such a trip, in such a cockleshell of a boat, not only without fear, but actually ready to cuss fate when the mad venture appeared to be quelled, went to my head. It aroused the old goat I thought dead, and

the blamed animal butted me into the maddest action of all—my joining you!"

Whately's face glowed as he reached the end of his lengthy explanation, and the glow deepened to red as he saw his companions smiling at his earnestness.

"Bravo!" cried Mary, clapping her hands.

Barker reached over and whacked the plump shoulder of his shipmate. Gradually a smile stole over the flushed face. Perhaps for the first time since leaving his hat and gloves and cane behind at the Battery, Whately felt himself one with Barker—an equal.

"And I'm glad I did it," he said simply. "I feel like a real man again!"

Barker had his own thoughts about that, but left the assertion unchallenged. There could be no doubt that Whately had changed for the better, even in his brief time at sea; but he was still soft, still an innocent in matters marine, and not by any stretch of imagination a real he-man of Barker's caliber.

But in one respect he was Barker's equal—in his own estimation far superior. As the fine, calm weather persisted day after day, opportunities were many for trying out the theory. Mary Sterrett was undoubtedly a bewitching sea nymph. The sun declined to burn her smooth skin, but tinted her a mellow gold until she glowed like seasoned ivory. Her long brown hair caught shards of glinting light and hid them like jewels, only to leap into being and dazzle the sight with every motion she made.

If she knew how keenly she was followed by two pairs of ardent eyes, she was clever enough to conceal the knowledge. She was a true daughter of Eve, for all that. From her own gleaming eyes, half veiled behind sweeping lashes, she compared the two men, their marked physical differences, their utterly contrasting mental processes, their ways of showing or concealing their interest in herself.

Ardent outdoor girl though she was, Mary possessed a deep vein of romance. Sterling good fellow, too, still she nourished a healthy and growing strain of coquetry. With it all, she was intensely feminine; but perhaps coquetry was nearest to the surface during those languorous Gulf Stream days, when the deeps of the blue ocean were strewn with the golden meshes of the sargasso weed, and the tropic birds wheeled ceaselessly overhead.

She felt the inevitable admiration that Barker's virile strength commanded. Once, when Whately was chatting to her animatedly—scraps of small talk, no more, but inducing laughter—she caught a glimpse of Barker's face as he sat steering the scarce moving sloop. A queer little ripple passed down her spine. The menace of the fighting male glittered in the sailor's eyes, as he watched his rival's successful efforts to entertain the woman.

Mary hugged herself in glee. The voyage bade fair to be monotonous in those windless, unsprayed days, until she realized what a factor for entertainment lay at her hands. Innocently enough, she permitted Whately to flirt with her after the manner of his kind. With no other motive than to be impartially a good fellow, she laid herself out to charm Barker with the same sort of light attentions that she received from Whately.

That Barker was incapable of understanding flirtation had never occurred to her. In her own world, and Whately's, a flirtation was as much a part of everyday life as a dinner party. In the world in which Barker had lived, the relations between a man and a girl could be only of two degrees, and he would have killed the man who dared to hint that Mary Sterrett could trifle with a man's heart.

So far had he gone already. That he took the matter seriously was soon to be made apparent.

At the close of a speckless, blazing day, when even the woolly cloudlets had gone from the sky, and the air remained sultry after sunset, the sloop lay idly swaying on a breathless sea, in which the only signs of life were a distant sleeping whale and a small fleet of Portuguese men-of-war. These iridescent creatures, possessing a beauty too great to fit the generally applied name of jellyfish, and possessing defensive weapons powerful enough to earn for them the more belligerent title, floated along, regardless of the windless heavens, like tiny argosies of mother-of-pearl.

"Oh, look at the nautilus!" cried Mary mischievously. "Oh, do let's get one, to examine it!"

She flashed a pleading glance at Barker, who sat on the cabin top, peeling potatoes for supper. It was Whately's watch, and that perspiring individual lounged by the wheel, although the sloop lay as motionless as the sleeping whale.

Barker glanced at the pretty creatures, grinned, and went on with his potatoes. Whately, meeting her glance as she shifted it to him, at once got to his feet with a willing smile, and plunged overboard. He had never met a Portuguese man-of-war.

As he grasped the largest of the near-by jellyfish, it drew up all its drooping whips, clung to his hand, and discharged all its devilish artillery in one broadside, which wrung from its assailant a lusty, astonished roar of pain.

Mary uttered a ringing peal of laughter as Whately floundered to the sloop's side, still holding on to the captive. Barker kicked aside the potato pail with a smothered curse, flung a rope to Whately, and helped to haul him on board, while Mary stared at his suffused face in amazement.

"Don't do that again, Whately," Barker gritted.

"Any harm?" Whately asked, forgetting the stinging fish in his hand in his surprise at Barker's expression.

"You're on watch—that's the harm."

"But the blessed boat's becalmed. Besides, Miss Sterrett wanted one—didn't you?"

Whately turned to the wide-eyed girl.

"Miss Sterrett ought to know better than to ask for one of the beasts," Barker retorted. His face was now white with anger. "I'm not concerned with her wishes, anyway, but in your quitting the helm. It's the second time you've done it. Next time I'll show you your place!"

"Of all the asinine—" stammered Whately, and stopped abruptly.

He had seen and recognized the menace in Barker's white face, and, to give him credit, it failed to frighten him; but the pleading in Mary's eyes stopped him. He dropped the cause of the trouble over the side, where it sailed away as nonchalantly as if nothing had happened to break the even monotony of life.

As he sat again at the useless wheel, Whately examined his swollen hand, red and blistered, wondering at the numbness that crept up his arm to the shoulder. From time to time he stole a look at Barker, by no means convinced of his fault; and from time to time he glanced at Mary's face. The girl sat with her back to him, staring fixedly at Barker, who declined to meet her eye.

At length she rose, took the pail of potatoes from him, and curtly told him that she

would prepare supper without his help. She entered the cabin companionway. As she turned, meeting Whately's half smile, her own round chin was set in a stubborn mold. Her soft lips had taken on a hard line, and the expression in her dark, lustrous eyes said as plainly as eyes could say:

"Wait! I can tame a bear, growl he never so loudly!"

V

THE fascinating uncertainty of Gulf Stream weather brought a spell of rain squalls and thunder in their turn, with a long, rolling sea, which rapidly became confused and precipitous as the wind hauled around to the northeast. Since the nautilus incident a very perceptible change had come into the spirit of the little group of adventurers, mostly due to Barker's interpretation of things. Whereas before he had seemed to accept Whately as the embodiment of inexperience, and as one with whom he must bear patiently, he now treated him as an avowed rival. Whately pursued the even tenor of his daily way, engaging in open flirtation with Mary, sometimes approaching sentiment, without in the least associating Barker's altered attitude with that circumstance.

Mary felt the change. Womanlike, she enjoyed the subtle suggestion of impending battle ever closing about her, and, womanlike, she did nothing at all to modify it. Hour after hour she lay in the sun on the cabin top, basking like a sleek cat, chatting merrily with Whately, accepting such little attentions as the adjusting of a cushion, the lighting of a cigarette, the bringing of a limejuice swizzle, but ever watching from under half closed lids the hard, stern face of Barker at the wheel.

"Do you know, Mary, you seem to fit the surroundings so well that I wonder why I never thought of this sort of thing before," Whately said, striking a match.

"Lighting my cigarette?" she asked slyly.

"No—getting a boat of my own, and inviting you to sail it for me. I could sail on forever like this. Could you?"

"But it wouldn't be fair to Barker to keep him at the wheel forever."

"Damn Barker!" he muttered, flipping the match overboard as it burned down and scorched his fingers. "Can't you be serious for once?"

Mary sprang to her feet with a laugh.

"I am so serious, now you remind me, that I am going to relieve him. Why, the poor man has been steering all this hot afternoon, and—"

"He's on watch, isn't he?"

"It doesn't matter. It's his boat, he does all the work, and I feel like a sponger on him. Give me my cushion, please."

Whately colored slightly, but he was growing callous as his physical well-being seemed more assured. Still, he could not wholly forget certain strenuous days when Barker had taken upon himself the entire burden of the work, irrespective of hours and watches. He picked up the book Mary had made a pretense of reading, and leaned against the main boom, chewing the cud of reflection, rebelling against the slight he fancied she had put upon him.

Through the very smallness of the sloop, he was forced to listen to what went on in the cockpit.

Barker's dark face brightened as Mary flung her cushion down beside the wheel and stepped down after it.

"Let me steer awhile," she smiled.

"You shall steer all the dog watch," he replied.

There was a boyish note of eagerness in his voice. She made a pretty little grimace of protest, but accepted his decision and snuggled down beside him.

"You are captain," she said. "Must I ask your permission to talk to you? One is not supposed to speak to the man at the wheel, I understand."

"Do you think I would want you to obey such a rule?"

"Oh, you are quite gallant!" she cried. "Why, even Rupert, the society darling, could never think of anything more Chesterfieldian."

"Damn Rupert!" was the sharp retort, and Whately heard it with astonishment, scarcely conscious that he had used similar terms a moment before.

Mary settled still deeper into her cushion, purring in expectation of learning Barker's methods of conducting a tête-à-tête with a maid; but the skipper was no lady's man. When he had damned his rival, his resources seemed used up. He sat and steered in silence; but if his tongue was helpless, his eyes were eloquent, and he fixed such a gaze of concentrated worship upon the girl that she took up the attack as the best means of defense.

"I don't think your company manners compare with the sample," she pouted after a long silence.

"I'm a sailor, not a society darling," he retorted.

She reached up and patted his brown hand.

"Now that's really clever!" she said. "I think I like the sailor best."

If a skin so tanned could blush, then Barker blushed. To avoid meeting her eyes, he looked steadily over her head until he felt the blood leaving his face. Then he stammered, with a terrific effort:

"You like the sailor best, but you call the society darling 'Rupert,' and you call me 'Mr. Barker,' or 'skipper.'"

"That's only right, isn't it?" she returned innocently. "Should I call my skipper 'Tom'?"

"Don't you like the name?"

"I adore it. It's so masculine—so much more so than Rupert, isn't it, Tom?"

Barker's subjection was complete. As he watched the distant squalls marshaling in ranks upon the horizon, and noted their nearer approach, he swelled with the importance of an accepted suitor—which was premature, and perhaps foolish. The voice with which he summoned Whately to clear the decks and take the wheel, while he reefed the mainsail in preparation for the now imminent squall of wind and rain bearing down, was the voice of the victor.

"I'll take it," Mary said. "Two can reef quicker than one, can't they?"

She stood up to take his place. The advancing swell passed under the little sloop, making her reel, and the girl tumbled into Barker's arms, with a little surprised laugh at the readiness with which he caught her. Her laugh turned to a gasp of sheer breathlessness at the power of his embrace, and her own fair face was crimson and averted when she struggled free and took the wheel.

She watched him furtively, half affrightedly, as he went to work like a real seaman, helped aimlessly by Whately; but she could never lose sight of the difference in the two men, and it was not at all in favor of the society darling.

"Haul it down, quick!" Barker yelled, letting go the halyards and gripping the flapping canvas. "Here, gather it in this way, man!"

The squall was now rushing over the blue sea in a hissing line of rain-thrashed foam, and the sloop turned her head from it under

Mary's skillful guidance. Barker delayed overlong, in his pleasant preoccupation. Still, there was no danger. The sail was down, the sloop plunged forward under her jib, and only the reef points needed to be tied and the sail got up again.

"Make it fast, old boy!" Barker shouted to Whately. "That's you! You'll make a sailor yet!"

Secure now in his fancied triumph, he could afford to treat the other man as a defeated rival who had put up a good fight.

"Now then—sway her up!" he yelled above the screaming wind. "Good man! Every ounce of fat you lose gives you a ton of strength. Now get into your oilies and let Mary go below. It's your watch. Keep her about southeast, and watch the squalls that make up from leeward. They're the lulus!"

That was the longest speech he had made to Whately in days.

VI

As often happens on the edge of the Gulf Stream, squall followed squall, with crashing thunder, blinding lightning, and torrential rain for two days. Then the weather settled down to a real stubborn gale, which raised a fiendish sea, and made every rope and thread of canvas crack. It made, too, a thing of utter horror out of the tiny vessel, whose very lack of size insured the three human creatures aboard being hurled like so many inanimate cork fenders from side to side.

To stagger from end to end of the reeling cabin meant certain bruises, if no more serious injury. Even Barker, the seasoned mariner, lost flesh from every corner of his body. Mary sported an angry red discoloration on her forehead, which hurt sorely, though she tried to laugh it off. Whately, not as soft as on embarking, still held flesh enough on his bones to bruise easily, and he was pretty much one tremendous bruise from head to toe.

For two days the merciless seas harried the Seafarer. The faces of its crew grew haggard from lack of sleep. They had not known a hot meal, or indeed a full cold one, since the gale set in. Mary was carrying on a terrific bluff of cheeriness that deceived nobody.

Toward the end of the second day she aroused at the wheel, and realized that she had been nodding. Barker was struggling with an unfinished sea anchor, intending to

use it that night, if the sea and wind showed no signs of moderating. Whately had been below for an hour, trying to doze off, but really watching Mary's brave face as she fought against sheer weariness.

He saw her nod, and got up, to struggle into his oilskins again. He felt ashamed of himself lying there, although he had stood the long, hungry watches like a real man. Mary called to Barker while Whately was tying on his sou'wester.

"Is there any sign of the gale moderating, Tom?"

Barker gazed around the smoky horizon disgustedly, and shook his head.

"Then I'm going to make another try to cook something," the girl cried. "A good meal will do us all good."

"Better not. It's no bed of roses down there," Barker yelled.

Whately had appeared, and Mary called him to the wheel with an unsteady laugh.

"Take the helm, Rupert! Keep her dead before the wind. You shall eat one meal anyhow, both of you. Poor boys, you look about ready to drop!"

She said nothing of her own weariness. Whately's eyes fastened upon her face as she relinquished the wheel to him. Then, with the spontaneous impulse of a great boy, urged by the brave, sisterly womanliness of her, he swept her to him and kissed her.

Mary's eyes widened in astonishment. She uttered a little gasping cry, and vanished through the cabin slide in a flutter of wet curls and streaming oilskins.

Whately bent to the task of steering the crazily veering sloop, his face slowly losing the crimson color that had flooded it when his lips met Mary's. Suddenly he became aware of an intent gaze fastened upon him, and looked up to meet a glare of devilish fury in Barker's face. The skipper himself was in the act of crawling in over the cockpit coaming, the white of his knuckles showing vividly through the brown of his skin.

"Did you dare? You hound! You—"

Barker began to splutter, and whatever he would have said further went away on the gale in chattering incoherence. He launched himself at Whately, scorning all supporting hold, and swung his fist viciously for the amazed face before him.

In the shock of the blow Whately let go the wheel, and the sloop swung across a sea. The lurch threw Barker against the

cabin slide, and precipitated Whately upon him. Whately got his hands on his assailant's throat, and his own face was as white as Barker's knuckles with fighting madness. Another lurch tossed both of them headlong into the cockpit.

Up from the cabin rose Mary, with horror and anger in her eyes.

"Madmen!" she cried, leaning over the two men with fists clenched and breast heaving. "Oh, such insane fools! Barker, have you lost your senses utterly? Can you hear me? Do you know that the water tank is empty? Empty, I tell you, and here you are—"

Barker growled out an incredulous curse, and plunged below. A saucepan lay rolling on the cabin floor near the water tap. He seized it, and turned on the tap. Nothing came.

"It can't be!" he yelled. "There were eighty gallons when we left, and we can't have used it. Whately, can't you say anything, you lump?"

"Surely the water can't be all gone?" Whately contributed inanely.

Mary left him to his steering, with a frown of impatience, and went below again. She found Barker on his knees, with the floor boards up, and groping among the pig-iron ballast for the water-pipe connection. Water slopped along the bilges, and he tasted it dubiously. He swore softly, and tasted again. Then he met Mary's anxious look.

"No doubt of it, girl," he said. There was no petulance, no anger, in his tone now. He was once more sane, balanced, and ready to face a terrible fact like a seaman. "This is too fresh for leakage. The pipe has been broken by the ballast being flung against it. Damn such arrangements! Now what can we do, Mary?"

"Whately put the two water jugs from the lifeboat down here, didn't he?"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" Relief flashed in the man's eyes. "That's one worth-while thing he has done. Four gallons that leaves us. Holy smoke! What a sea!"

The little sloop heeled over until the thunder of the seas roared clear across her decks. Crash after crash sounded overhead. Whately, who had been staring into the cabin, leaving the helm to care for itself, was hurled bodily out on deck, picked up by the sea like a chip. He was saved only by becoming entangled in the main sheet.

"Take hold of the wheel!" Barker howled at Mary.

The little vessel lay perilously over on her side, and the sea battered at her furiously. One glance revealed the reason; but for a moment Whately's predicament, his strangling face and his imploring eyes, were disregarded in the greater threat that menaced the sloop.

Mary fought stoutly to get the boat's head off the wind, without success. The upturned lifeboat on the port side held imprisoned some two tons of water, weighing the sloop down beyond hope of answering her helm. Only the release of the water could save her; only the loss of the boat, apparently, could release the water. Whately dragged through the hissing seas at the end of his rope, slowly strangling, while Mary heroically divided her efforts between steering the hove-down craft and trying to haul the gasping man on board.

Barker picked futilely at the lashings of the lifeboat, unwilling to admit that he must sacrifice the boat. The sloop leaned deeper. Unwilling still, he turned to get the knife kept for emergency in the companionway; and the sea saved him all further decision or action.

With a smashing roar the imprisoned water burst the boat loose. The sloop righted with a sharp swoop that snatched at the one rope remaining; then a sea crashed the boat against the sloop's side, starting a plank in the hull and splintering itself to matchwood. The debris careered astern on the crest of a comber, battering Whately's head and face cruelly.

With no more than a grim scowl at the vanishing planks that had been a boat, Barker pulled Whately in, and silently attended to his streaming cuts and livid bruises.

"Let me see to him," Mary said. "You're not fit to dress hurts like those, after what I saw just now."

Barker laughed bitterly.

"I can do well enough, and at least he won't kiss me!" he retorted.

He dragged Whately below, leaving Mary biting her lips and hiding her face.

The promised square meal did not materialize that night. Barker set to work upon Whately with bandages and unguents—at first with a slight show of gentleness, induced by the thought that Whately alone was to be thanked for their precious remaining store of water.

But for that splendidly foolish rescue of oars, water jugs, and the boat itself—a piece of crazy pluck rendered useless, after all, by the mishaps of this day—the outlook must have been gloomy indeed.

Nevertheless, when Whately, wheezily thanking Barker for his attentions, added without heat the information that as soon as the boat would permit him to keep his feet, he intended to hammer Barker well in payment for recent favors of another sort, there was scant room left for gentleness.

Barker had intended to attempt that meal. Instead, he snatched up some biscuit and tinned beef, handed some to Mary, and choked down his own ration before getting the jib off the laboring sloop and launching the sea anchor.

"Isn't the glass rising?" asked Mary, watching the operation with mild surprise.

"Slowly," Barker replied, with averted face. "Chief thing is that we're leaking badly, girl. The boat started one of our waterline seams, and as long as we sail we leak. Just as soon as I can risk it, I'll get over the side and try to stuff some cotton into the leak."

Mary sat huddled in a corner of the cockpit far into a still boisterous night. There was no steering to do, and small need for a lookout, once the riding light was put up; but she wanted to be alone.

She found herself wondering at her attitude toward Barker. When he had struck Whately, she could have beaten him with her small fists; but now, recalling all things, she was forced to concede that her feelings grew warmer as she thought of him.

She colored furiously when she met his eyes looking squarely at her, and abruptly realized that she had been thinking aloud.

"It's ridiculous—impossible!" she exclaimed defiantly.

She felt a subtle current of returning balance as Barker turned away with a frown of puzzlement.

VII

IN the darkest hour of the shrieking dawn the sea anchor rope snapped, and away went drag, oars, and tripping line. To use the imperfectly completed apparatus at all, Barker had been obliged to spread the mouth of the canvas cone with the oars of the lifeboat, cross-lashed. The loss mattered little, as he saw it, now that the boat itself was gone; but the loss of the drag necessitated getting sail on the sloop

again, and that meant a recurrence of the leak as she labored.

"Have to pump every two hours, that's all," Barker decided, when the little craft once more shouldered her way stoutly over the steep seas.

To the discomforts of the brine-reeking, reeling sloop was added a flood of bilge water that cataracted clear around the skin of the hull, and turned every bit of fabric into a sodden, soggy horror. To heap bitterness upon bitterness, two hours out of every four must be devoted to the pump—a futile rod in an inadequate pipe which discharged a bare pint at a stroke.

There was no question of watches now. Man or woman, it was simply a matter of alternating steering and pumping, with food snatched cold and uncooked whenever possible.

When at last the smoke of the gale passed, and the sun again gave promise of returning fine days, Barker hastened to get observations for position. He knew full well the responsibility that lay upon him, with barely four gallons of water remaining, and the nearest land an unknown distance away.

The results of his sights caused him to doubt their correctness. He shook his head and prepared to take others.

"Is it so bad?" Mary asked, a little bit anxiously.

"Rather it's unbelievably good. That's why I'm taking no chances," Barker returned. "If my figures are anywhere near right, Bermuda is only about sixty miles distant, girly!"

"Then there's water enough to allow us a wash," Whately remarked innocently.

Barker didn't reply, but Mary's expressive face was full and complete answer. Whately went on with the job Barker had given him—rolling cotton threads into a thin cord, in readiness for the attempt to calk up the leak when their position was definitely established and the sea went down a trifle more.

"Well?" Mary asked, when Barker again finished his calculations.

His worn, lined face wore a grin as of old.

"A bit better than I hoped," he said. "We are rather to the south'ard of our latitude; but the lighthouse bears about fifty-four miles east by north. Ready with that cotton, Whately?"

The sea still ran high for the tiny ship

when Barker got into a bathing suit and looped a rope along the side. What talk passed between him and Whately was strictly necessary to the job in hand; for since Whately had hinted that he meant to square up for that punch in the face, even comradeship seemed to have gone into a decline. Whately questioned no orders about the boat or its work. Neither did he miss a chance to show that he considered himself, in everything else but sheer seamanship, not only Barker's equal, but probably his superior.

He watched Barker go overboard into the looped rope. He smiled a bit disdainfully at the sailor's courageous but hopelessly useless efforts to sustain repeated duckings as the sloop rolled, and still to persevere with his attempt to stuff packing into a seam that was never in the same place twice.

"Better let me try that," he remarked, after Barker had emerged half strangled for the tenth time and the calking was still outside the seam.

"Think you can do what I can't? Where d'you get that sort of dope?"

"If I can't, I'm sure you can't; and it has to be done, hasn't it?"

Whately went to get into his own bathing suit, and Barker crawled on board to revive his flagging energies with a cigarette. Mary lit it for him as she sat steering. He nodded toward the companionway with a sarcastic grin.

"You heard it, didn't you? Watch friend Fat do stunts! He's got the gall, all right. Some change, I'll say!"

"He certainly can do things in the water," Mary said coolly. "Remember the jellyfish? And the lifeboat? Why should he not try this? You haven't made a job of it, have you?"

Barker tossed his cigarette overboard and stared at her in surprise; but Whately appeared at the moment, and work was urgently calling.

Mary shrewdly regarded the two men as they discussed the best means of achieving their object. Comparing them, as they sat on the low rail with legs dangling into the water, she was struck with the amazing alteration in Whately since first seeing him. True, he was plentifully battered and bruised, and his fair skin was literally scorched from him in great patches; but she realized that the chief change lay in the replacement of soft fat with solid mus-

cle, and in the harder, more vital aspect of his face, not entirely due to the need of a shave.

"I understand you want to stuff all this cotton into the crack, and hammer it tight," Whately was saying.

"That's all. It's easy for you," Barker returned. "Go to it!"

"Yes—not impossible. Can we get another rope tied to this one, and passing around the boat?"

Barker deigned no response except a glare of superior wisdom. He had struggled for an hour to stay with the leak as it rose and fell with the motion of the boat. He knew how trying it was to be plunged under water time after time, and to feel the cotton slip out of the leak through his own inability to stay submerged. He took up a coil of line, passed it under the stern, and made one end fast to the slack of the first rope; then, at Whately's suggestion, he hauled the free end tight and fastened it to a cleat on the other side of the deck.

"Go ahead—do your tricks!" he growled, and sat on the rail again.

Whately, without replying, gathered up the roll of cotton and slipped over the side into the loop of the rope. The hammer he tucked into a belt improvised with more of the cotton. Then he filled his lungs, and Barker sulkily appreciated the depth of that tremendous breath. Mary leaned over, too, with a quizzical smile on her face, as the boat dipped Whately under water.

He stayed under, gripping the ropes with his legs, and in the transparent water he looked as much at home as if the sea was his natural element. Barker felt his fancied superiority getting shaky when the despised fat man stayed right on the job for almost two minutes without quitting. Bitterest of all pills to swallow, the work was visibly progressing. When Whately came up to breathe, a full half fathom of calking was in the seam. When he went under again, he had the hammer in his hand, and the hollow blows resounded through the boat's hull as he drove in the threads.

"He's done it, hasn't he?" cried Mary warmly.

"I'll take a look," was the ungracious reply.

Barker slipped down beside Whately on the rope, as that gasping, smiling toiler emerged and tossed the hammer on deck.

Barker tried hard to remain under water

long enough to find a fault in the work, but he failed in both objects.

"It's all right," Whately grinned. "That's what I call a good job, Barker!"

"Then it's the first thing you ever did that's all right," snapped Barker.

"Oh, do shut up, you men!" Mary exclaimed sharply. "Must you everlastingly scrap and snarl? Isn't it well done?"

"Barker hates to concede me any improvement," grinned Whately. "I have a lot to learn about seamanship, I admit, but there are things I can beat him in."

"What things?"

Barker glared angrily. His anger increased at sight of Mary's approval of his rival. It intensified still more because the other man was smiling confidently.

"In plenty of things that don't have to do with boat sailing," Whately specified.

"As a man?" Barker inquired.

"I think so. Suggest a test!"

Whately's smile was sunny now, for Mary was beaming at him with approval.

"I have a mind to see how you shape as a man!" growled Barker, whose fists were tight clenched, and his face white with rage.

"If you feel that way, old chap, let's at least consider Mary, and wait until a more suitable moment."

"You leave Mary alone!" yelled Barker furiously. "Remember your place, or I'll—"

"For goodness' sake, do be quiet!" Mary cried frantically. "Cool down, you big pair of boobies! If I hear another word in this strain, I'll never speak to either of you as long as I have to stay in the boat. I'm sorry I ever saw you. Come to your senses, and see if the leak is stopped!"

Late that night Barker sat steering, with Mary snuggled down beside him, trying to catch glimpses of his face in the starlight. His eyes were clouded with weariness and anxiety. Like a passionate boy after a childish outburst, he was silent and sad.

She recalled all the hours of stress through which he had passed, when he alone bore the burden of their safety on his shoulders. She felt the pity which is proverbially said to be akin to a warmer sentiment; but she fought against it, lest any show of feeling should impel him to make advances. She was not in the mood to listen to him then. In fact, since the outbreak of bad temper that followed the

calking operation, she had no inclination to bandy light exchanges with either man.

The few lazy clouds drifting overhead, the almost smooth seas, the brilliant heavens, all helped to bring physical ease after the stress of storm. Under other circumstances these sunny days might have induced romantic sentiments; but Mary thrust aside any such thoughts, and turned to more mundane matters.

"The leak is quite stopped, isn't it?"

Barker did not reply for some moments.

"Are you sleeping?" she asked irritably.

"I asked you if the leak was quite stopped. Of course, if you still want to refuse credit to Rupert—"

"Yes, it's stopped, Mary," the skipper replied hastily. Then he lowered his voice, and she wondered at the pain that rang in it. "It's stopped. It was a good piece of work."

"Then why so grumpy? Isn't everything all right now?"

"Wind won't last until morning, girly."

"Gracious! Is that anything to gloom about? Haven't we had wind enough lately?"

"Yes, maybe," was the reply.

Another spell of silence, then Barker told her a stark fact which she had forgotten.

"If there's no wind we can't sail; and we're on the last jug of water, Mary!"

VIII

THROUGH the night Barker refused to leave the deck. He seemed possessed by the idea that merely by staying awake he could hold the dying breeze. Long after dawn he sat by the useless wheel, staring stonily ahead at the long, glassy hills of rolling water that reflected the sun like a brazen shield. The sails hung idly, the boom swung to and fro monotonously. Overhead two tropic birds wheeled and uttered their shrill call.

Twice he got up to lower the mainsail, to prevent it slatting itself to pieces, and twice he turned away with a muttered curse directed at the windless heavens.

Mary had prepared a cooked breakfast, and Whately had drunk two cups of coffee. Barker refused coffee. He knew that Mary had measured out the water, and that there was not enough for two cups apiece.

Whately appeared unable to realize the water shortage. Since he had performed that valuable service in stopping the leak, he had assumed a completely different at-

titude. He carried himself jauntily, in sharp contrast to Barker's somber mood. He remarked to Mary that their overbearing skipper was singing small since the leak was stopped.

That was a mistake, and Mary left him in no doubt about it.

"The smaller you sing, too, the better you will compare with him," she said. "You don't seem to realize that you drank up half his day's ration of water when you took that second cup of coffee. Have you heard him complain?"

"But surely we must reach the islands before—"

"Surely we cannot, unless wind comes. Go on deck, and leave me alone. I could shake you for your thoughtlessness!"

"I'm sorry, Mary. That's all it was," Whately said soberly. "I wish you wouldn't forever throw Barker's superiority at my head, though. I can be as much a man as he, I think."

"Then show that you can. Talking won't prove it."

The sun sank in golden splendor which shattered hopes of wind or rain that night. Barker sharply called Whately to lower the mainsail. When it was secured, and the sloop lay rolling lazily with only the jib set, Mary brought supper on deck. She made no opening for anybody to take two cups of tea. A graniteware cup was set down beside each man, and the meal was eaten in silence, until Barker at length finished the slow, wise sipping of his tea. Then Whately, without a word, passed over his own cup.

Barker glared at him.

"What's the bright idea?" he demanded.

"Didn't know I was taking your whack this morning. Take mine now," Whately said, and got up to walk forward.

Barker framed a contemptuous retort, but Mary swiftly gripped his hand.

"I'll keep it, if you won't drink it," she whispered. "It'll do him good to go without for a while."

She slipped below and poured the cooling tea into a bottle. Her own experience during that scorching day told her that even half a pint of cold tea might yet prove invaluable.

They dozed on deck that night, uneasily, fitfully. In the dark hours after the moon had set Barker climbed aloft and searched the horizon for the wished-for flash of

Gibbs Hill Light. The breeze, before it died, had carried them several miles on their course; and, while he scarcely dared hope, the wish was at least a straw to be grasped at.

The horizon lay black and bare.

"See anything, Barker?" Whately asked.

"No!" was the curt answer.

Whately never guessed the bitterness that almost choked Barker in the effort to restrict himself to that one word.

Mary lay on the deck, staring up at the vault of the sky, where even the stars seemed to have withdrawn to an immense remoteness, as if determined to join the deserting breeze in flouting the voyagers. Now and then, when she allowed her eyes to close drowsily, her thoughts wandered uncontrolled. She found herself once more comparing Barker and Whately. She sat up with an impatient cry.

"Fools, both of them!" she exclaimed. "I'm a fool, too!"

She lay down again, and slept; but her cry had aroused Whately. He looked around and asked sleepily who called.

"Go to sleep!" growled Barker out of the darkness. "She was telling the truth in her sleep. We're all fools—don't I know it well enough?"

"Speak for yourself," retorted Whately, "and don't include Mary!"

"Don't ever speak her name to me!" Barker snarled.

He made a motion as if to approach Whately; then he stopped, and sank back into his corner, cursing softly.

Whately sat for a long while gazing intently into the blackness where Barker lay, feeling the urge to hurl himself headlong in that direction. The urge became almost irresistible, and Whately's placid nature revolted at the change that was stealing over him. To get a grip upon himself again he went forward and stood there, swaying to the ceaseless heave of the sloop, holding on to the rigging, staring into the night. The vast emptiness of the ocean, its utter calm, gave his mind a modicum of ease, and he turned to seek his blanket again.

"Barker!" he shouted. "Barker!"

Barker and Mary sprang up in alarm.

"What is it?" cried Mary.

"Look! There it is again—the light!"

Barker stared. The sloop had not moved for hours, and lighthouses don't move.

"I see it!" cried Mary. "There! There it is again! Oh, wonderful!"

Barker still doubted, even though all could catch the flash of the light in the sky. He counted the interval between flashes.

"One, two, three—"

He counted up to nine seconds. On the tenth the flash was seen again.

"Must be Gibbs Hill," he admitted reluctantly.

He felt an unreasoning hatred for Whately because he had first seen the light.

"How far off is it?" Whately asked, with his mind upon unlimited water to drink.

"It's a twenty-four-mile light, isn't it?" Mary said.

"Lights have been seen where there are no lights," returned Barker surlily. "Wait until we see the land, then I'll tell you how far off we are."

Still there was no wind, but all three slept more easily with the light flashing across the unruffled sea toward them. In the morning Barker was at the masthead with the first flush of day, and remained there so long that both of his companions hailed him in turn to hear the news. He slid down by a stay, a frown on his face.

"Nothing in sight," he said. "Must have been the reflection thrown up high. Perhaps we imagined we saw it. I heard some one whisper last night that we are all fools. Now I know!"

Mary bit her lip and colored hotly.

"I'll get breakfast," she said. "Same water ration for to-day?"

"No—halve it," was the ungracious response. Barker met Whately's protesting glance with challenge in his own. "Any remarks?" he demanded.

"I hope it rains soon, that's all," was Whately's retort. "Many days like yesterday would drive us crazy in earnest."

"You'll have plenty of chances to show how you shape up alongside a man, anyway!"

"For pity's sake won't you men stop snarling at each other?" Mary cried angrily, thrusting her flushed face up through the hatch. "Do you imagine I want to listen to a pair of he fishwives everlastingly quarreling? Stop it, do!"

Breakfast was a dismal affair, and after a blazing forenoon nobody wanted to eat at midday. Barker went through the operation of finding his position, and sullenly reported the island still thirty miles distant.

"It can't have been the light we saw, then?" remarked Mary almost hopelessly.

She had measured the water. There was a bare ration left for each. The horizon was speckless, the sky of a steely blue. The men made no response to her question, but stood apart, studiously avoiding each other.

Toward night all scrutinized the skies in a sort of fearful hope. Barker laughed harshly, for there was no trace of promise in the bare face of the heavens. An hour earlier Whately had thrown overboard the empty cans from the galley pail. They bobbed on the surface—those that had not sunk—within reaching distance of a boat-hook. There was neither wind nor current.

When the sun vanished, all looked intently for the light to appear. It failed them. No flash in the sky came and went to give them ease this night.

It was another period of dire discomfort. Added to the discomposing factors of the previous night was the physical pang of increasing thirst, for the day's ration had been little more than a mockery. As if that were not enough to make sleep impossible, there was the bitter disappointment of their failure to see the light.

Mary was muttering as she dozed. Whately seemed to have sunk into a state of stolid tranquillity. Barker paced back and forth like a caged wild beast, his eyes straining into the night with angry protest.

Abruptly he stopped. He stared unbelievably into the southwest. Then his shout brought the others tumbling from their blankets.

"Quick! Spread the mainsail to catch it! Rain!" he yelled.

He set desperately to work casting off the stops from the sail. Whately plunged into the task beside him, panting with eagerness, licking his lips anticipatively. Mary ran to get pails and pans.

A faint breath of air stirred the loosed canvas, and a big drop of rain fell with a splash. Barker laughed with the relief of it. He flung a jesting word across the sail at Whately. Both stood straining on the canvas, open-mouthed, waiting.

Then the squall passed, not fifty yards away. That single drop of rain was their portion.

The men glared after the receding squall. Mary silently returned her pans and pails. The night resumed its devilish calm.

IX

Just before daylight Whately had an inspiration. It had come to him among

a medley of queer fancies as he lay with closed but sleepless eyes under the stars. Taking the boat hook, he cautiously sank, one by one, the floating cans and bottles which so terribly proved their utter absence of movement.

When Mary sat up on her blanket, turning a drawn face toward the pitiless sun just clearing the horizon, he regarded her hopefully. As if her thoughts had in part paralleled his own, she leaned over the side and scanned the glassy swells. The light of renewed hope sprang into her eyes.

"We have moved!" she cried eagerly. "See, our empties are nowhere in sight, Tom!"

Barker caught a glimpse of Whately's gratified face, and his own face darkened in anger. The tins and bottles were gone, truly, but Barker knew how little the sloop had moved. He saw the wet boat hook lying on the cabin top, and detected Whately in a thoughtful act which ought to have originated with himself.

"Whately's sunk 'em to kid you," he growled meanly.

At sight of the girl's swift dismay, he had manhood enough to feel sorry, but not enough to say so.

Food failed to appeal to them that day—a terrible day of drought. When the tiny ration of water had been issued in the forenoon, no more remained—no liquid whatever, except the cold tea in the bottle, which Mary had hidden, only to be produced in extremity.

She remained in the cabin, so that the blazing heat of the sun might not accentuate her discomfort. At intervals she peeped out, watching the men's faces, listening keenly for a word which should hint that tempers were strained to the limit; for she understood how near Barker was to an outbreak of blind rage when he glared at Whately and blurted out the truth about the empties.

Except for an occasional ascent of the mast to sweep the horizon with the glasses, Barker lay through the day under an improvised awning, gritting his teeth and cursing softly. Whately whistled through clenched teeth and open, dry lips. Now and then he would peer through the cabin hatch and watch Mary's face.

"Poor, plucky little kid!" he muttered once.

Then his tuneless whistle rose more tunelessly, more shrill.

"For God's sake cut out that blasted noise!" snapped Barker savagely.

"Dear old chap! What a blessed bear it is!" Whately returned hoarsely. "One of us simply must keep cheerful, don't you know. Shall we take it in turns? What can you do in a musical way?"

Whately laughed dryly. Thirst was already frothing his brain. Barker stumbled to his feet with a bitter oath.

"I can knock that silly grin from your face!" he rasped.

Whately laughed again. Barker's slight reserve of balance seemed to leave him. His hand went swiftly to his hip, where his sheath knife hung.

"I can cut the silly tongue out of—"

"Give me that knife!" Mary stepped between them, and her small brown hand closed upon Barker's tense fist. "Do you hear?" she repeated furiously. "You madmen! You utter maniacs! Will you give me that knife?"

She twisted it from Barker's relaxing grip, and tossed it over the side. Then, with a glance of bitter contempt for both men, she went right into the bows of the sloop and lay down in the folds of the lowered jib.

The two men sat as far apart as they could get without going near Mary; and the agonizing day drawled by. In the evening, with the simple, unsalted meal, Mary issued to each a tablespoonful of cold tea. It was like nectar. Their faces registered ecstasy which was half fearful. The men stared at her in silent question.

"Oh, don't imagine our troubles are over," she said. "I may have another spoonful for you to-morrow. If you are not above taking advice, let me suggest that, instead of using up your vitality playing at brawling pirates, you should keep quiet and nurse your reserve strength. No sign of wind, or more rain, I suppose?"

Barker only shook his head gloomily. Whately seemed to be possessed of a devil of provocation.

"I wish you wouldn't put me in the same class with Barker," he said. "I didn't start any trouble, you know."

Barker's breath began to whistle through his tight teeth. His eyes glittered evilly, and his hand stole around to his empty sheath. Then he caught Mary's eye, and flung himself along a locker with the petulance of a chided boy.

As soon as darkness descended, three

pairs of hot eyes sought through the night for the elusive light. A vast emptiness seemed to fill the universe. Great, long swells came glassily from the southwest, rolled under the wind-forsaken sloop, and passed on toward the northeast. On the crest of such a swell the Seafarer chanced to be poised for a second, when the distant horizon happened to lie unbroken by the heaving sea.

"There's the light!" cried Mary excitedly.

"No doubt of it!" conceded Barker. "That's the light itself, not the reflection of the flash in the sky."

"Then we're all right, aren't we?" gasped Whately from a throat parched almost to cracking.

"Shall I give you some more tea?" asked Mary. "Can we chance it now?"

Barker glared from one to the other. He knew what they seemed incapable of discerning—that with no breeze, no oars, no power available, that island of hope twenty-four miles or so away might just as well be twenty-four hundred.

"My God!" he breathed raspingly, and gave Mary no other answer.

Restlessly they tried to sleep the dark hours away. First one, then another, would stagger on deck, stare hungrily at the mocking light, and return to the cabin. Mary slipped into a succession of fitful naps, in which she had dreams, visions, and nightmares.

The dawn brought little relief; with it the light went out, and there was no land in sight. Barker toiled painfully aloft with the glasses, after he had taken an observation of the sun. The calculation placed the sloop within twenty miles of the island. The glasses revealed the dim blur of the land, at last, lying in the immensity of the ocean like a whale asleep.

The heavens persisted cloudless, the sea glassy, the sun remorselessly smiling.

Sleep mercifully obliterated most of the hottest hours from their consciousness. Once, just past noon, there was a hint of air stirring, and the men dragged the sails up with hoarse shouts. The hint fooled them; the air was only a taunting puff of decay from a dead breeze.

Neither man cared enough to lower the sails again. They might hang there until the wind came.

Four hours later Mary came out of the cabin, gasping in her thirsty torture, bring-

ing her precious remnant of cold tea and a teaspoon. She felt that human nature could no longer go without liquid; but she could not drink even one small spoonful without sharing with her shipmates. She looked up at the sails. With a little cry she put the bottle in a safe corner, ran to the wheel, and cried with all the strength remaining in her:

"Wake up, boys, wake up! Here's a breeze! Oh, how long have we wasted it in sleep?"

The men sat up with stupid faces, incredulous. The little sloop was snoring gently through the smooth sea with full canvas, making an easy three knots an hour without the slightest commotion, scarcely leaning from the upright, so soft and true was the breeze. Better still, the land lay in clear view ahead; still distant, truly, but raised to such a degree that Barker knew the sloop must have covered a good ten miles toward it without a hand at the helm or a waking eye on deck.

The men tried to smile at her. They avoided meeting each other's gaze—queerly, Mary thought. Barker took the wheel from her, and she nodded brightly in his face.

"This is fine!" she said. "I feel like celebrating. I'm going to make you boys a real supper. Will you try to run through the reefs if it's dark, Tom?"

"Let's get there first," returned Barker, less sanguine than she.

"Old bear!" she chided, and vanished to her preparations.

Now it seemed as if fortune intended to heap favors on them. The gentle breeze persisted, and strengthened somewhat. Out from the windward sky arose a veritable rain cloud, which could not possibly miss passing over them.

"Hurry and get the big dish pan!" Barker told Whately, as he himself half lowered the mainsail to catch the priceless rain.

"Who has hidden the knife?" Mary cried from the cabin. "The slicing knife, I mean. I can't see it anywhere."

"Never mind it. Use the bread knife," growled Barker.

"That isn't here, either."

"Never mind about knives. Here's rain coming. Hurry with that pan, Fat!"

X

THE rain fell in straight slashes, filling the decks and roaring into the outstretched

sail. The squall that brought it held wind in plenty, too. The very force of the wind carried the rain past far too quickly; but while it lasted they caught the big dish pan nearly full, and all the while the sloop tore madly through the water toward the beckoning land.

"Careful, now—don't spill a drop!" Barker warned Whately, as he lifted the pan to carry it below.

Barker raised the mainsail again, after assuring himself that no more rain impended. He frowned impatiently when he realized that the friendly breeze threatened to die on the heels of the squall; but the land lay very near, they had water enough, and there was to be supper.

Whately had paused in the companionway, holding his precious dish pan tenderly.

"How far off are we now?" he asked.

"A good swimmer like you ought to be able to make it," was the sarcastic retort.

Barker turned to the wheel. He shifted the helm until the sloop held her proper course, moving ever more slowly. Then he cast a turn of rope around the wheel and stepped into the companionway.

"Here, let me take that water," he said. "You're likely to capsize it pouring it into the jugs."

"I won't," replied Whately, and stepped down to the cabin.

"Give it to me, I said!"

"You men!" cried Mary angrily. "Won't you ever—"

Barker took hold of the dish pan. There was a tiny lurch of the sloop, and the next instant the water had disappeared into the blankets of the lee side bunk.

Mary stood aghast. For a brief moment the men stood crouching, horror in their eyes. Then horror gave place to fury.

Barker's hand went to his shirt, and came out gripping the missing slicing knife. Whately backed away, his white teeth gleaming in a primitive bestial snarl, and his right hand brought forth the other missing knife. Like bulls they clashed together, instinctively reaching out with guarding hands to catch the other's weapon.

Shrieking hysterically, Mary flung herself upon them, wide-eyed and deathly white. Their savage struggles flung her off, hurling her heavily against the bunks.

Breath hissed through clenched teeth as they swayed on unsteady feet in the heat-blistered, reeking little cabin. Shadows whirled madly in the flickering light of

dying day; and the breeze died while two madmen lost all pretense to human semblance in the bestial desire to kill.

"Oh, stop, stop! Please stop!" panted Mary.

Again she flung herself between them, heedless of the darting steel. The men were blind, dumb with murder lust. There was a fierce flurry of attack, the knives tore free from the restraining grips upon them, and Mary fell back shrieking, with blood pouring in a gushing torrent from her wrist.

"Oh, you've killed me!" she cried, and sank down on the wet floor.

As suddenly as the fight had started it stopped. The two men stood breast to breast, face to face, sanity coming back into their reddened eyes. Their knives dropped. The slicing knife stuck quivering in the floor, transfixing the hem of Mary's bathing suit.

"God!" gasped Whately, dropping down beside the swooning girl and gripping her wounded arm above the deep gash.

"Who did it?" panted Barker, frantically reaching for the little first-aid kit.

"Two madmen did it!" Whately cried. "Where's the bandage? Oh, hurry!"

The medical outfit, never overcomplete, was all but empty. First Barker's mate, and later Whately, after he had been battered by the wrecked lifeboat, had used up everything except a single bandage and some adhesive strapping.

Whately tied the bandage tightly around the arm for a tourniquet, and cross-plastered the gaping wound. The bandage slipped; the blood spurted afresh, tearing away the plaster. Both men, in their mental agony, perspired in streams.

Mary's eyes flickered as she came out of her swoon. They opened, and she looked steadily into the two men's faces with an awful reproach.

"Make a couch on deck. It's too hot for her down here," snapped Barker, stooping to lift the girl.

Whately, already on the floor, forestalled him.

"I'll carry her. Take up the cushions," he returned.

For an instant Barker's eyes glared challenge. Then he glimpsed Mary's eyes, and silently gathered up the cushions.

Whately bore the girl tenderly up the narrow ladder, and laid her down in the coolness of the advancing night. Barker was gazing intently at the dark loom of the

shore, limitless miles away, it seemed. The skies smiled as speckless as before the brief hours of breeze—fiendishly speckless, now.

Whately turned from Mary in awe, to send his gaze shoreward too. He could not endure seeing her lick her dry lips with a parched tongue, knowing the cause of her pain.

She cried a moaning little cry.

"Can't you do something for me? I'm bleeding fearfully. Must I stay out here and die?"

Whately dumbly twisted a fresh tourniquet about the arm, and stopped the blood again. The sloop lay as motionless as the land.

"For God's sake let us do something!" Whately gasped harshly. "Mary must be got ashore, Barker!"

"I know it, but how?"

Barker picked up a sounding lead from the locker, attached the two-hundred-foot log line to it, and dropped it into the sea. It ran out to the end, reaching no bottom. He hauled the dripping line in hopelessly.

Out of the gloom winked two lights, looking exasperatingly near. He stepped to the compass and took cross bearings, laying down the bearing lines on the chart.

"Four miles from the nearest shore," he said.

"Then won't somebody see us?" Whately asked impatiently.

"They won't take any notice of us. We've made no signal. Might if we—hell, why didn't we do that first?"

He ran below, and fetched up a bucket full of rags and canvas scraps. Saturating them with oil, he set a light to it and stood waving it at the shoreward rail.

Four miles is a long way; the shore of the island nearest to them was sparsely settled; the lookouts on the lighthouses would scarcely notice such a flare, unless some definite message were spelled out, repeated, and repeated again. And Mary lay moaning in the agony of deathly thirst and creeping weakness.

"Is there nothing you can do?" she whispered.

Barker uttered a grating laugh.

"If I'd ever bragged of my swimming—"

"By God, the very thing!" exclaimed Whately, and groped for his bathing trunks.

"How far d'ye say?"

Barker had made the suggestion simply to hurt his rival. He had never thought for a moment that any man would be so

mad as to take the challenge up. Four miles of dark sea, through cruel reefs, with the certainty that sharks abounded!

"How far?" demanded Whately from the cabin.

He knotted his trunks securely and came on deck.

"I said four miles; but never mind. If you think you can do it, so can I. You stay here. You're the doctor!"

Whately leaped out on deck from the cockpit and shouldered the other away from the cabin ladder.

"You can't make it, Barker. It's one thing I can beat you at. You have to stay. A skipper must stick to his ship, you know!"

The last was a gibe, delivered with an unpleasant laugh; and it came near to precipitating another murderous fight.

"It'll take a man to reach shore, and I'm the man!" Barker snapped back.

"You can't do it. Suppose a breeze comes up—what shall I do?"

"I'll see to that now." Barker ran forward and lowered the best anchor to the full extent of the chain. "Now she may drift until the anchor catches hold in the shoaling water, if she's in the tide limits," he said. "Get the sails off her. I'll bring a doctor out in a boat in no time. Let me pass!"

Whately stepped aside, but toward the rail, tensing for the plunge. Barker sprang and gripped him.

"Let me go!" snarled Whately, struggling savagely. "Don't you see yet that I am the man she would want to serve her?"

"Like hell you are!" swore Barker.

"For pity's sake both of you go!" cried Mary, aroused to a momentary strength by exasperation. "Go, and never come back! I hate you both. You've killed me, and you stand there—"

With one impulse both men plunged into the sea, wading the waters to devilish phosphorescent light, leaving behind them a luminous trail as they headed shoreward, racing, with only the one thought possessing them—not to save Mary's life, but to beat each other.

Cool reason gradually returned as the soothing waters sucked the heat from their blood. At first Whately went far into the lead, swimming with the powerful stroke of an expert swimmer. Barker, less expert, drawing heavily upon his greater physical

strength, hung stubbornly in his rival's wake.

Whately dropped back once, smothering a groan, and told of striking a submerged reef. Barker scraped his knee at the same time, and what might have precipitated bitterness again led to mutual guidance and forbearance. The land rose up blackly before them. A thin line of snowy foam blinked at its foot, and the muffled voice of calm weather surf crooned softly in their ringing ears.

Barker gritted his teeth in distress, almost at his last extremity. Whately slowed down to husband his remaining powers, astounded at the persistence with which the dark shore line remained at a distance.

"You carry on, Fat. I'm all in!" panted Barker at last, his voice ending in a watery gurgle.

"Come on, you poor fish!" Whately replied, turning to give the other a hand. "Strike out! You must! I felt something slither against my leg just now. I'm sure it was a shark! Come, now—catch hold of my shoulder."

Barker sank. He came up strangling, and clutched Whately's hand desperately.

"I felt bottom!" he gasped.

Two minutes later Whately hauled him up on the sand, stood for an instant over him in doubt, then turned him over on his face, and staggered away inland in search of human habitation and help.

XI

BARKER stumbled to his unsteady feet when heart and lungs resumed their normal functions. Vaguely he knew that he had failed to show up well beside Whately, at whose manhood he had persistently sneered. Now, with his first dubious glance seaward, another equally humiliating thought assailed him, and he swore at himself with awful profanity.

"She called us fools!" he raved. "She was dead right about one of us—me. God knows where the sloop is! The tide might as easily carry her seaward as landward; and I, the damned lunatic calling myself a seaman, quit the ship, leave her adrift!"

He plunged off along the shore, shouting hoarsely, seeking in every cove and crevice for something that would float; stopping frequently to gaze into the seaward darkness for sign of the drifting sloop.

"Not even a light put up!" he howled, and stumbled on.

His strength returned as he searched. When at last he fell over the gunwale of a fisherman's skiff, hauled up on the beach, and found, by groping, a pair of oars and a calabash bailer, he had power enough left to drag the boat to the water and to row her back to the spot where Whately had left him.

There he waited, hovering between two decisions. Again and again he decided to row out in search of the invisible sloop; again and again he told himself that without help he could do Mary no service. He cursed himself plentifully for leaving her alone, cursed himself and Whately for insane fools, and cursed Whately last and most fulsomely for his present tardiness.

A dancing light shone over the sea. He was satisfied that Mary had recovered, and had lighted a lantern. The rhythmic thud of many oars, receding seaward, coming from the direction of that bobbing light, drowned his satisfaction, and told him that a shore boat was already speeding out.

"The blasted fat swine has left me here!" he swore.

He shook a fist at the sound of the boat, and cursed Whately again. He cursed Whately, and Whately's parents, and Whately's forbears to the Pilgrim landing.

"I say, old chap, I know how you feel; but if you must cuss out anybody in that horrible fashion, fall to and cuss the blooming doctor!"

It was Whately's voice, and Whately himself emerged from the blackness of rocks and cedars.

"My Lord! Haven't you gone out?" stammered Barker. "Did you find no doctor, then?"

"I found a doctor, and from what he said about us he's a blessed good man," returned Whately, with a queer laugh.

"To hell with what he said about us! Where is he? Mary may be bleeding to death while we wait here for the sleepy Bermudian!"

"He's with her by now. That was his gig, with six good oars, that passed just now."

"Damnation fool, why did you let him go without—"

"Funny thing, Barker—that's exactly what he called us—damnation fools. He said the girl will be better off, and will stand a better chance of recovery, if she doesn't see either of our faces for a month. I told him everything, y' know, while he

was getting his buggy ready. Decent chap, too. Gave me a first rate pick-me-up. Said I—needed—"

Whately lurched. His eyes closed. He tried to recover, tried to laugh; but his newly won physical fitness was unequal to the strain he had recently sustained. He toppled over into the sand at Barker's feet.

It was very late in the night when Barker drew his boat up before a small house. He had dragged Whately into the skiff, rowed along shore and into Castle Harbor, crossed that, and headed in for the first dim light he saw. A house light at that hour gave him hope; and his hope was realized, for it was the very house from which Whately had fetched the doctor some hours before.

It was not many minutes before both bruised and weary voyagers found bodily rest. Bermudian kindness is proverbial; but even Bermudian kindness could not give them ease of mind while out in the night their sloop was in strange hands, and Mary, their shipmate, perhaps at death's door, with no friend beside her. They hinted at their trouble to the doctor's house-keeper, and she replied smilingly but very much to the point.

"From what I can understand of the whole thing, there need not have been any such serious danger to the poor girl had it not been for certain of those friends you deplore not being with her now. Go to sleep, and let the doctor take care of her. You look as if you need him yourselves!"

Twelve hours' sleep they were allowed; then their hostess found them lodgings near by. The doctor's house was small, just a bachelor establishment, and its resources were strained to the limit to take care of Mary.

They had seen her brought ashore, very white and tottery, and her pain-drawn eyes had met theirs with a terrible look as she was taken to her room. Misery loves company, and as they sat on the shore, gazing moodily at the little Seafarer—which lay at anchor close by, with one of the doctor's boatmen taking care of her—Tom Barker and Rupert Whately were more in sympathy than they had ever been.

"Guess I'll get aboard and to sea again," said Barker. "I feel all right now." There was an awkward pause. Then he went on, keeping his face averted: "I suppose you'll stay here now, and make it up with Mary?"

Whately laughed.

"I've never been what you might call a lady's man, Barker, but I believe I can read signs as well as the next man. Stay on yourself awhile. She rather admired your muscular fitness, it seemed to me."

"You're crazy!" Barker snapped irritably. "She never let me kiss her!"

"She didn't let me," retorted Whately. "I couldn't help myself. She was such a stunning little sport through all that discomfort and privation. Besides, you forget that you—I—one of us, I mean—"

"I know that. You needn't rub it in, Whately!"

"Then do you imagine any girl wants to have either of us make love to her again?"

"I don't know," replied Barker, with rising heat. "I know this, though—if you are not going to make a play for Mary Sterrett, I shall. What happened was no fault of ours. That girl has too much sense to hold that against us. She's the perfect sailor's girl, and—"

"You flatter us, Barker. Not our fault? How did the water get upset? What started that crazy fight? Mary has sense—you bet she has!"

"Oh, well, I'm not going to fight with you again," said Barker wearily. "You lugged me out of the water, and you got the doctor. I'll stay and say good-by to her, anyhow. Let's row out to the sloop and see how the old boat is shaping up."

XII

It was two weeks before either man was fit to leave the doctor's care; for once the reaction set in, after their bitter experiences, they took on a mild fever which threatened for some time to develop dangerously.

Reporters came to them from the island newspapers. Visitors came, urged by curiosity. Islanders stood in crowds, daily, looking at the tiny sloop that had come to their island through such perils. They were born sailors themselves, those islanders, and could appreciate boatmanship; but most of the folks who spent an hour gazing at boat and crew were urged on by the hope of seeing Mary. There was nothing unique in two men sailing a small boat over the sea. One man had done it alone, not so long ago; but for a girl to endure what the Seafarer had come through meant that the girl was well worth seeing.

Numerous inquiries by the more pushful

ones speedily established the relative importance of the members of the Seafarer's crew.

"We don't count for much, Barker," Whately laughed.

The two men were idly slapping paint on a new rowboat which Barker had acquired to take the place of the lost lifeboat. Neither had yet been permitted to see Mary, although they had themselves only left their beds two days before.

"Nobody does, barring the blessed saw-bones!" grumbled Barker, viciously annihilating a green fly with a brushful of red metallic paint. "Look—there's another bunch of curiosity mongers turned away. If you peep hard through the screen of the east veranda, you'll see Miss Mary Sterrett quite able to receive callers, judging by the proximity of Mr. Doctor Man!"

"That's all right," replied Whately slowly. "Quite as it should be. Mr. Doctor Man has saved her life by sheer proximity. Besides, though we haven't been admitted to see her, I have a hazy notion that she came to see us while we were woozy with the fever. I want to thank her for that before I go back home, anyhow."

Barker painted away in silence for a while. He was covering plank at a terrific rate, impelled to extreme activity by his rebellious soul. He rebelled against the doctor, chiefly. He also rebelled against the fate that had interrupted his voyage, never admitting for very long that it was his own folly that had helped most in causing the delay. Finally, he felt rebellious against Whately's amazing transformation.

Whately had dragged him out of the sea, undoubtedly saving his life; Whately had reached the doctor, certainly saving Mary's life; but what was nearer at hand, what jarred bitterly, was that Whately was keeping up with the painting, foot for foot, doing it well, without visible effort, and wearing an old coat of Barker's.

Whately the exquisite—Whately whom he had called "Fat" in derision—Whately the soft, pudgy man of inaction—was doing hard work alongside the hard sailor, doing it as well and as rapidly, and wearing the hard sailor's coat.

"So you're going back home, Whately?"

"I suppose so. Nothing else to do that I can see. You seem to have an idea that I'm the same fat and useless—"

"Oh, forget it!" snapped Barker. "Have I said anything like that?"

"No, old chap, not audibly, but I've been watching your face as you painted."

"You're wearing a coat of mine, aren't you? You beat me out swimming. You can—"

"Don't talk so emptily," Whately cut in irritably. "Why talk of beating at all?"

"Oh, you make me tired, Whately! Life's made up of beatings, given or taken. You do as you like. I'm going up to the house right now, to try my luck. I don't believe the doctor man can beat me, anyway!"

"What on earth are you drooling about? The man's treated us white. He's saved Mary's life. Now you talk of licking him!"

"Not that way," Barker grinned, carefully cleaning his hands with turpentine. "I've been thinking. I'm not convinced yet that Mary's so fickle as you try to make out. She showed me once or twice that she didn't hate me. I'm going to make the touch right now."

Whately regarded him for a moment as he might regard a strange insect, before remarking:

"What's that ancient yarn about the dude in the mining camp dance hall? They kept on chucking him out; and after he had been dumped out of the window into the horse trough four times, he concluded that it was just possible they didn't want his company. Go ahead, old chap. I hope the water's fine!"

It was later in the afternoon when Barker returned. Whately had finished the painting, and was lying at full length on the warm sand, puffing fragrant smoke up at the mosquitoes. He peeped curiously at Barker as that silent, purposeful individual laid hands on the freshly painted boat and turned it over on its bottom. Whately smiled softly.

"Going on board?" he asked. Getting to his feet with deliberate motions, he put a hand to the boat to help, and drew back with a gesture of annoyance. "Why, Barker, you can't use this boat yet. It isn't dry," he said.

Barker pushed the boat down the beach without reply.

"From the signs, I understand the water was very fine!" grinned Whately.

At last he brought forth a spark from the flinty Barker.

"Go to the devil! No, I don't quite mean that, Whately. Good-by, I mean.

I'm going to sea, bound east. Anything you want to get, on board? Didn't you have some bits of jewelry?"

"Er—yes. I'll come out with you. Can you wait two minutes? I'd like to just run up to the house."

"Better take your bathing suit," Barker retorted, his bronzed face lighting up and his eyes twinkling.

Whately went straight to the doctor's house, and entered the veranda without ceremony. Mary sprang from the hammock with a little cry. The doctor did so with a little swear word. Whately stood before them with a whimsical smile on his face.

Mary Sterrett looked utterly sweet in a newly acquired frock, her golden-hued face holding the bloom of health returned, her soft brown hair cunningly bobbed. That had been done while she lay ill. She smiled brightly as she held out a hand to Whately.

"I'm so glad to see you, Rupert," she said. "Have you seen poor Tom?"

"Yes, Mary, I saw him not five minutes ago," Whately replied, retaining her hand and fastening his eyes upon her face.

"I was so sorry," she said, and genuine sympathy crept into her eyes. "I do hope I haven't hurt him; but, you see, he asked me to marry him, and—and I couldn't. I like him, and all that sort of thing, but—"

"But he did his best to kill you!" the doctor put in quickly.

Mary's eyes fell. Every line in her attitude showed that she agreed with the doctor.

Whately had gone to the house determined to put his own fate to the test, pricked on by pride and Barker's failure. He glanced from Mary to the doctor, and a slow smile broke over his face. He still held the girl's hand. He gripped it now a bit harder, and said quietly:

"By Jove, yes! We both did, didn't we? Idiotic thing to do, of course! I just came up to see that you are all right, and to say good-by, Mary."

"I have something more to say to you," she added, with a smile.

Whately tensed with half fearful eagerness. Her little brown hand was returning his grip warmly. The doctor looked bored, and not too well pleased. He was a handsome fellow, that doctor, and beside Mary he formed the other half of a perfect pair; but Whately was conscious of his own re-

juvenation, or physical regeneration, and he felt a thrill as he hung upon Mary's word.

"Good luck!" she said, and let go his hand to take the doctor's. "Rupert, shake hands with my fiancé. I'm going to make my home here, I think. I didn't tell Tom, because he seemed so badly cut up."

Whately threw off his own disappointment as gracefully as he had cast overboard his hat and cane at the Battery a month before. He grasped the doctor's hand heartily.

"Lucky dog!" he said. "Lucky both of you! Glad you've got a life saver instead of the other sort, Miss Sterrett. Good-by!"

Mary stood, hand in hand with the man who had truly saved her life at last, watching with a mist in her eyes the departure of the two men who had saved her life at first, when they picked her up in that howling storm off the Jersey coast.

"I think they both gain something," she said. "Tom Barker has learned that there are others on earth besides himself. Rupert Whately has changed from a fat, useless lump into a man again, with some curiosity as to the rest of life. But oh, I do hope, if they sail on together, that they never fish another poor girl out of the sea!"

When the great round shield of the setting sun stood like a golden ball on the western horizon, and the silver disk of the full moon crept up in the east, as if to see

whether it was time to appear, the little Seafarer sped like a fairy bark over the turquoise sea beyond the reefs, her bowsprit pointing fair at the moon. Down the silver path of the moonbeams she sailed, cleaving herself a track of dazzling foam, leaving behind a wake of bubbling brine.

"You see, Tom, there's really nothing else for me to do," Whately was saying. "Of course, I have lots of things I ought to be interested in at home; but I'm keen on completing this voyage with you. It's making a man of me. Why, I can wear any of your things now, and I'm hard! Didn't you see me get the blessed anchor up by myself?"

"I did!" grinned Barker cheerfully. "If you felt like I did after finding out that the water was fine, you could have pulled up a battleship's anchor alone!"

He gazed intently toward Catherine's Point, mellowing into the dusk. On the head, two small figures stood in sharp relief against the afterglow.

"After all, we were a pair of fools, Whately!"

Whately, too, was gazing at those two small figures. His face was thoughtful, his eyes dark with reflection.

"We were," he agreed; "but there are others, Tom. Believe me, old sailorman, this is the life!"

And Tom Barker chimed in with a snuggle of content as he settled himself into his corner at the wheel:

"You've said it!"

THE END

MY LADY'S PRAISE

WHEN in some public place
I hear the general voice
Speaking my lady's praise,
Softly do I rejoice
And hide my happy face,
Lest it my heart betray;
But of each word they say
I keep the golden sum,
And when the night has come,
And in my arms she lies,
My eyes in her deep eyes,
To her I tell it over—
How all the world doth love her.
Then softly she replies:
"Yet am I only thine,
And thou art only mine!"

Richard Leigh